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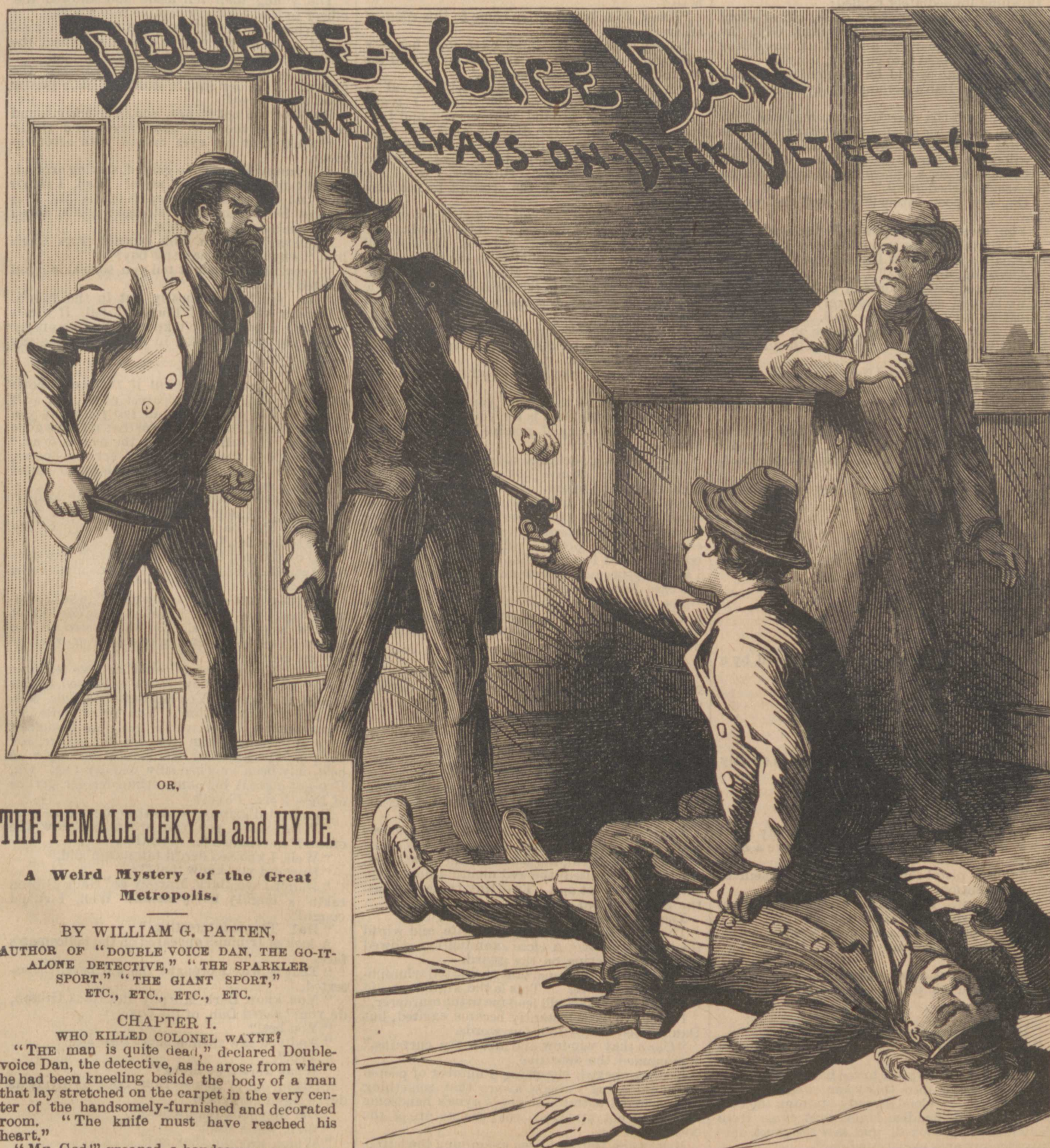
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OR,

THE FEMALE JEKYLL and HYDE.

A Weird Mystery of the Great
Metropolis.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,
AUTHOR OF "DOUBLE VOICE DAN, THE GO-IT-
ALONE DETECTIVE," "THE SPARKLER
SPORT," "THE GIANT SPORT,"
ETC., ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHO KILLED COLONEL WAYNE?

"The man is quite dead," declared Double-voice Dan, the detective, as he arose from where he had been kneeling beside the body of a man that lay stretched on the carpet in the very center of the handsomely-furnished and decorated room. "The knife must have reached his heart."

"My God!" groaned a handsome young man who had been watching the investigations of the detective. "My poor father! Who could have

THE GAMIN HAD SNATCHED DAN'S REVOLVER FROM THE FLOOR, PLACED HIMSELF ASTRIDE THE STRICKEN DETECTIVE AND DREW A "DEAD BEAD" ON BARK MURPHY.

done this horrible thing? I did not know he had an enemy in all the world."

"Perhaps it was not an enemy who did it."

"Who, then?"

"A house-breaker—a burglar whom he detected here."

"It is possible. But I must notify the police—I must send for a physician."

"A physician can do him no good. It is now a case for the coroner."

"But I must have detectives on this case at once. My father's murderer shall be brought to justice!"

"I am a detective, sir. This is my card."

"Dan Downing! Are you the famous private?"

"I am Double-voice Dan."

"Then you are the man above all others to be here at this moment. It was fortunate you heard my shots. Bring the man who murdered my father to punishment and name your reward!"

"I shall most gladly take hold of the case. It is probable the wretch has made good his escape by this time—it is certain, in fact. It will be impossible to do more, now, than have the police look for suspicious characters."

The detective—a medium-sized, finely-formed man—stepped briskly to the open window. As he did so, a voice outside called:

"What is the trouble here? Who has been shooting?"

It was a policeman.

Downing immediately replied:

"There has been murder done, officer—foul murder! You know me—Downing? Give the alarm in this quarter, and let all suspicious characters be taken into custody, quick!"

The policeman would have remained to ask questions, but Dan's peremptory order sent him away, in haste.

"Now," said the detective, turning back into the room where the grief-stricken young man was kneeling beside the dead body of his father, "I will complete my investigations. It is worth a great deal to get a square look at things before they are disturbed at all."

"Oh, my poor father!" groaned the young man.

"You must brace up now," declared Dan. "I imagine there are some frightened servants in the hall. What shall I tell them?"

"Anything, anything!"

Dan walked to the door and unlocked it, finding, as he had surmised, several shivering and inquisitive servants in the hall. To their inquiries, he replied that the master of the house had met with a serious injury, and then he sent them all away.

Turning back, he found the young man seated in a chair, his face buried in his hands.

"I have some questions to ask you, sir," came sharply from Detective Downing.

The other lifted his head, his face haggard.

"All right," he said, chokingly. "Go ahead."

"Where were you when this murder took place?"

"I was coming down from my room when I heard my father cry out."

"From this room?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say?"

"I did not distinguish any words; it seemed like a cry for help."

"What did you do?"

"Hastened at once to the door."

"And called to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he reply?"

"I heard some choking words, followed by a heavy fall."

"Did you come in?"

"The door was locked."

"The door to the hall?"

"Yes."

"How did you gain admission?"

"By this other door. I ran around as swiftly as possible."

"This other door was not locked?"

"It was not."

"You found your father—how?"

"On the floor there, as he is now. My God! It was a horrible sight—a sight to drive a man mad!"

"But the pistol-shots—did you fire them to attract attention?"

"Surely not. I fired them at the person I believed had struck my father down."

"Ha! Then you saw the murderer?"

"I think so—I am sure so."

"Where?"

"Through that open window."

"By which he probably escaped from this room."

"Yes, sir."

"He must have been on the steps."

"He was. From them the window can be reached."

"How did you happen to see him?"

"As I rushed into this room, and saw my father there, his blood already staining the carpet, I heard a fiendish laugh that came from the window. I looked, and saw the most devilish face my eyes ever rested on!"

The young man shuddered, and lifted a hand to his eyes. Dan was watching him keenly.

"Describe it," commanded the detective.

"I fear I cannot. It was the face of a fiend, and it looked scarcely human. It was beardless and wrinkled with age; the bloodless lips were drawn back in a most horrible grin, exposing some snaggy yellow and black teeth. The eyes fairly burned. Oh, it was simply devilish!"

Dan saw the speaker was strongly affected.

"Then you fired at this person?"

"I did."

"You carry a revolver?"

"Yes, sir."

"You fired twice?"

"Yes."

"After the first shot—what?"

"The puff of smoke hid the face for a moment. When it rose, the person was gone."

"How came you to fire so promptly?"

"When I heard the laugh of the murderous wretch, I also saw it lift a pair of claw-like hands, and shake them at me. *Those hands were stained with blood!*"

"Horrible!" Dan involuntarily exclaimed.

"I shall never forget the sight—I shall always remember that fiendish face!"

"Your second shot?"

"I now believe to have been fired at a shadow. I saw the face was gone, and I leaped toward the window. I was so excited I knew not what I was doing, but I fancied I saw the murderer dart around that corner to the left. I fired again. I scarcely know what followed until you came and found me beside my poor father here."

"Does your father often come to this room of an evening?"

"Very seldom. He must have come here for some purpose, turned up the gas and found the wretch here who murdered him."

"A thorough investigation will reveal if anything is missing from the house. I heard your shots from around that corner, and I assure you the murderer did not come that way. Had he done so, I must have seen him. In your excitement, you probably made a clean miss, and he has escaped. However, I will leave no stone unturned in the attempt to run him to earth."

"And you shall have all the assistance money can render. You have probably heard of my father—Colonel Andrew Wayne? He was well known in the city, especially on the Street. He was connected with the Manhattan Car Company and held stock in the Missouri Pacific, Erie and other concerns, besides making an occasional deal in cotton."

"I knew him both by sight and by reputation. I also know the reputation of his son Rodney."

The young man started.

"Well, you do not know anything bad about me."

"Nothing more than that you are inclined to live a trifle faster than is for your good."

"That is the story of gossips," asserted young Wayne, a bit hotly.

Dan Downing shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well. It does not seem to be my concern at all—at present. If I find it necessary to make it my concern, I trust you will have good sense enough to keep your temper. It sometimes becomes necessary for me to pry very closely into the private affairs of a family for whose interest I am working. Whatever I learn I keep a profound secret, unless the exigency of the case demands its revelation."

The detective again bent over the dead man and made another examination. Happening to move the colonel's arm slightly, something beneath it caught his eye.

It was the hilt of a knife!

Lifting aside the nerveless arm, he saw lying on the floor the dagger with which the terrible deed had been committed!

It was an important discovery.

CHAPTER II.

THE GAMIN DETECTIVE.

At a glance, Dan saw the dagger was no ordinary affair. It would have attracted his attention anywhere.

The blade was wavy, like the folds of a serpent, and above the guard the serpent was coiled around the hilt till, at the very end of the hilt, the head was raised, the red mouth being open, the tongue thrust out. Two tiny rubies formed the gleaming red eyes.

The blade was stained with blood.

The detective picked up the knife and wiped the blood from it. A close examination showed him some lettering on the guard.

"Here is a most important clue!" fell triumphantly from his lips. "This is the knife that did the work, and it should lead me to the murderer."

Rodney Wayne instantly became excited, but Dan calmed him with a few words.

"Close that window and draw the curtains," commanded the detective.

Rodney obeyed, observing a number of people were gathering outside, aware that something had occurred within Colonel Wayne's handsome home, but not knowing what the nature of the occurrence was.

Meanwhile Dan had been examining the lettering on the serpent dagger and had made out the word "Cordova."

"Ha!" he muttered. "A Spanish knife! So much I have learned."

He examined the dead man's person to discover if he had been robbed, but everything seemed undisturbed.

"That is proof the black work was not done for the purpose of robbery," he thought.

Then came a nervous ring at the door bell. Dan swiftly turned to Rodney, who had re-entered the room.

"Attend the door," said the detective. "Do not trust that to a servant now."

The young man obeyed. At the door he found the policeman Dan had instructed to give the alarm and look after suspicious characters.

In his grasp the officer held a ragged street gamin.

"Caught him on the corner," the blue-coat explained.

Rodney fell back, with something like an exclamation of anger.

"You are not fool enough to think this boy did the deed, are you?" he cried.

"Dat's der stuff, mister!" triumphantly piped the boy. "I tole him I wasn't no highwayman ner nothin' of dat sort, but he nipped me jes' der same."

"Downing told me to look for suspicious characters," replied the policeman, hotly.

"That is right," spoke the voice of the detective, who appeared at the hall door behind Rodney. "Bring the boy in and close that door so the whole street can't stare in here."

The young man fell aside and allowed the officer to lead his dirty captive into the hall.

"Bring him along," was the detective's command, as he led the way to a room adjoining the one where the murdered man lay.

"Dis hain't no fair shake!" protested the gamin. "I'm der square stuff, an' dat's on der dead level. See?"

But he could not escape, and he quickly found himself in a room so handsomely and richly furnished that his eyes bulged with astonishment.

"Jimminy Hocus!" he gasped, staring around. "Ain't dis dead loads of style! Well, I sh'd chuckle! Never set me peepers on dis kind of a lay-out before, an' dat's straight goods, sure's my name's Scrimpy Stubbs."

"Officer," came a trifle sternly from Dan's lips, "why did you nab this boy?"

"I reckoned he might tell you something you wanted to know."

"Oh, yes!" sarcastically put in the gamin. "I'm der wise man of Borneo, I be! If dere's any t'ing w'at you don't know as you wants ter know, jest drop a nickel in der slot an' see my mouth work."

Dan turned to Rodney.

"While I am finding out if this boy knows anything, send for the nearest physician. Of course he can do nothing but tell you what you already know, but it is a form that must be gone through. He will simply say the man is dead."

Rodney left the room to send for the doctor, and Scrimpy Stubbs, as the urchin had called himself, looked frightened.

"Say, has somebody bin swiped fer keeps?" he asked. "I don't want yer ter tink I done der job. I'm on der square; an' any of my pals'll tell ye dat."

"Why did you bring this boy here?" Dan once more asked of the policeman. "You must know he had no hand in the work."

"Perhaps not—and then again," was the almost sulky retort. "Some of these street urchins are bad ones. He was posted on the corner down there, and he tried to run when he saw me coming."

"Well, I hain't got no pertic'ler love fer your kind," assured the boy, scorn expressed by his face and voice. "You're rcutin' us kids w'en we hain't doin' nuthin'. You never pulls der right parties. I've seen a gang go t'rough a cove an' den turn him over ter der perlice, an' der cops'd pull him fer drunk an' disorderly w'en he'd only been knocked silly wid der bag. Oh, I've got a great big admerashun fer der perlice of New York, I hev!"

Dan smiled grimly, while the officer scowled.

"What made you run when you saw the officer?" questioned the detective.

"Well, I knowed dere'd bin suthin' did."

"How did you know that?"

"Didn't I see Bark Murphy an' Hack Gibson takin' a mighty lively sneak? Well, I sh'd cough!"

"Ha! This is interesting!"

A look of triumph appeared on the policeman's face.

"That is why I brought the kid here," he asserted.

"You know Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson, do you?" asked Dan, of the boy.

"You bet!"

"And you saw them a short time ago?"

"Yep."

"What were they doing?"

"Gittin' out of this section 'bout as lively as dey're legs'd kerry 'em."

"Did they look frightened?"

"Well, jest a sniff."

"Which way did they go?"

"Inter Forty-seventh an' toward Broadway."

"How long ago was this?"

"Not a great while. Jest erbout half an hour?"

"What is your business?"

"I'm one of dem newspaper fellers."

"What you mean by that?"

"W'y, I has a pull, go der rounds, take in der teeters, an' feed off der free lunches. W'en any bloke blows his mouth at me I flings back der side of my coat so an' say: 'Come off dere, cully! I'm on der *Herald*, see? If youse don't use me mighty gay, I'll hev yer picter in der next issue.' Dat allus brings 'em. Dey wilt."

The detective was amused by the gamin's manner, and he laughed outright when Scrimpy flung back his coat and exposed a round piece of tin that was pinned to his vest.

"You don't mean to say you are a reporter on the *Herald*?"

"I don't mean ter give you dat bluff," confessed the urchin; "but dat goes wid der most of der gulls. Der dead level facts is dat I sells pape's. See?"

"Well, what brought you into this locality at such a time in the evening? You could not be here to sell papers?"

"Well, I hed sold out my stack an' wuz lookin' round fer a little practice at my intended perfession."

"Your perfession? And what is that?"

"Der detective lay."

Dan laughed again.

"Well, you will make a healthy detective! But, what brought you *here* on such business?"

"Follered Bark Murphy, in course! But he give me der dodge, boss. Dunno's he knowed he wuz follered, but he skipped inter der Independence Hotel back on der corner near Broadway, an' I didn't see him w'en he come out."

"Then how did you happen to be up *this* way?"

"Took a walk fer me health."

"And you saw Murphy again?"

"Sure—him and Gibson—twin beauties dey is!"

"Did you follow them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I knowed dey'd been up ter somethin', an' I wanted ter find out w'at dat was."

"Did you hear any shooting?"

"Say, was dat shootin'? I t'ought I heard it."

"And you saw Murphy and Gibson running, after that?"

"Dey wasn't runnin', boss."

"You said so."

"Never. Said dey was makin' a hustle. Dey wasn't fools 'nuff ter make peoples look at 'em by *runnin'* in dis quarter. All der same, dey was makin' tracks, lively."

"Well," said Dan, with a long breath, "this bit of information may be of importance."

The policeman looked triumphant.

CHAPTER III.

THE MORPHINE FIENDS.

THE physician put in an appearance and examined the body of the murdered man. As Dan had declared, he could only pronounce Colonel Wayne dead.

Scrimpy Stubbs, the gamin, had been left in the detective's charge by the policeman, and when Dan had heard the doctor's report, he turned to the boy.

"Look here, my lad," he said, "how much do you know about Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson?"

"Dead loads!" was the prompt retort.

"You know where they are usually to be found?"

"Dat's der facts."

"Do you want to show your ability as a detective?"

"Do I? Great hokey! Give me a show!"

"Well, I will give you a show this very night. You look like a shrewd youngster, and I am going to trust you. You now understand a man has been killed, and it is not impossible that Murphy and Gibson did the job. At any rate, they were in the vicinity, and I must find them. I want you to take me to them."

Scrimpy looked Dan over critically.

"Be you goin' alone?" he asked.

"No; you are going with me."

"Be you goin' ter try ter 'rest them two toughs?"

"Well, that depends. Maybe so; maybe not."

"Well, ef you be, you'll need help."

"They are hard nuts?"

"You're shoutin'. Dey're der wu't in New York. It's dey're boast dat dey've downed t'ree of der perlice, an' never bin pulled yit."

"Well, we will try them one, if it is necessary. It may not be necessary, and we may not be able to find them."

"Ef dey're pulled, hev I got ter go inter court an' blow 'giust 'em?"

"You'll only have to tell how you saw them."

"An' den der Bridge gang'll lay fer me."

"Do they belong to that organization?"

"Sure. Murphy is one of der leaders, an' I say, boss, I don't like ter hev der gang on me."

"Then it's plain you'll never make a detective."

That touched the gamin.

"All right!" he said, boldly. "I s'pose dat's der clean stuff. I'm reddy."

"If these rascals are not pulled, you need not show your hand," assured the detective. "If they are pulled, they will be pretty sure to go up. If they had a hand in this job, they may go up for good."

Dan had a few words with Rodney, and then left the house, taking Scrimpy with him. Catching a car, they were carried down-town to Downing's office.

"Now, what kind of a place shall we visit?" asked Dan, when they were within the detective's headquarters.

"Tough," was the newsboy's curt answer—"mighty tough, boss."

"Near the bridge?"

"Yep."

"Wait here."

Dan had taken the precaution to lock the door when they had entered the office, for he did not wish to have the boy give him the slip, and he knew Scrimpy might take it into his head to do so.

Leaving the gamin in the front room, the detective entered the little back apartment where he kept his disguises. He set about making up in a careful manner, and Scrimpy was undisturbed for nearly half an hour.

At length the back door opened and a person entered, looking sharply at the boy.

Scrimpy sprung up.

Before him the lad saw a dark-faced man, whose beard and hair were coal-black, and who wore a hat like a sombrero on his head. His dress was cheap and none too clean, though rather fanciful. About his waist was a bright-colored sash that had evidently seen long service. His jacket was covered with bright buttons, and his pantaloons were large and flowing at the bottom.

This person scowled fiercely as his eyes rested on the boy, and he half-growled:

"*Buenas noches!* ("Good-evening.") Where is Senor Detective? Him I do want see. Speak! *Car-r-r-amba!* Why you do not speak? You do look frightened, little fool! *Por Dios!* Think I mean kill you? I never-r-r kill little boys; I kill *men!*"

"Great Scott!" gasped Scrimpy. "You look like a brigander!"

"Ha! ha! You say that? One time I maybe, very long ago. Now I have reform, I be a sailor. Where is detective? I have been rob."

"He went into that room a few minutes ago."

"Ha! You tell me that? Why he is not here now? No, no! You no tell the truth! *Santissima!* You lie to me, you I will give the length of my *cuchilla!*"

From the sash the speaker suddenly plucked a dagger, starting toward Scrimpy.

"Holy Jinks!" exclaimed the boy. "Der door is locked an' I'm in here wid er crazy critter! Well, it's fight den!"

He grabbed a heavy paper-weight from the desk and flung it at the man with such accuracy that it would have struck its mark fairly in the face had he not dodged. As it was, it broke a small mirror hanging on the wall.

Scrimpy seized a ruler and was about to let it follow the paper-weight, when a familiar voice cried:

"Hold on! hold on! You have the right stuff in you, Scrimps!"

And then the gamin realized that his visitor was the detective in disguise!

Downing had made himself up as a Spaniard and tried the effect of the disguise on the boy.

"Holy smokes!" exclaimed the newsboy, dropping into a chair and staring at the ferret.

"Dis does beat der ragged Dutch!"

Dan laughed.

"I fooled you, Scrimps, but you have spoiled a mirror, so I shall have to pay for my fun."

"I'd never t'ink dis was youse!" soberly declared the street Arab. "I never was so knocked on der head before!"

"Think this make-up will go?"

"Sure!"

"Then I am ready. I am a Spanish sailor who is looking for his mate Carlos. My name is Pedro. That is as good as anything else. I have you to take me round, for I was never in New York before. Swallow?"

"Like a fish. Dat's a good game. Come on." They left the office and made their way toward the quarter of the city where the Bridge Gang had their several retreats and coverts.

"I'll take you der rounds," said Scrimpy.

"First we'll go ter der places where dey'll be if dey hain't spectin' dey're wanted. If we don't find dem dere, den we kin go ter some of der worst holes, dough it'll be mighty dangerous, you bet!"

They visited several bar-rooms in the worst section near where the great Suspension Bridge is supported by the first arch on the New York side. For a time they were unsuccessful in finding anything of Murphy or Gibson, but Scrimpy finally led the way to a low dance-hall at the back of a bar-room, and there both the men sought were discovered.

That the place was decidedly "tough" Dan saw at a glance. It was only patronized by thieves, thugs and young rowdies of the worst

class, together with abandoned women and girls—creatures who had sunk too low for redemption.

An orchestra of three pieces was grinding out a wheezy waltz, and the floor was covered with circling figures. The greater number of the dancers seemed very languid and solemn, and the spectator would scarcely imagine from their manner that they were deriving any pleasure from the waltz. To the on-looker it seemed more like a laborious duty the young men and girls were compelled to perform than something from which they were deriving enjoyment.

"Dis is der night of der Morphine Fiends," explained Scrimpy, cautiously.

"The what?" softly asked Dan, in surprise.

"Der Morphine Fiends."

"Who are they?"

"Dey're der crowd w'at eats morphine an' hits der pipe. Dey have a dance here ev'ry two weeks. Dis is dey're night. Take a look at der mugs of dem."

Dan had noticed the faces of the dancers were pale as a rule, some being almost deadly white, despite the fact that the exertion of dancing should have sent a flush of color to their cheeks. He had often heard of a band of morphine-eaters and opium-smokers having a rendezvous where they caroused after a fashion peculiar to themselves, but he had never really put a great deal of faith in the story.

But now he found himself in the favorite resort of the Morphine Fiends, as they were called.

Neither Bark Murphy nor Hack Gibson were dancing. Not far from the bar were several small tables for the accommodation of drinkers, and the two toughs were sitting at one of these tables, talking with a lank, hard-faced female, who had perched herself on the top of it, a half-emptied glass of beer in her hand.

"Dat's Red Mag," explained Scrimpy. "She's a holy t-rror, an' you bet she's t'ick wid der Bridge Gang."

"I know her," cautiously declared Dan. "I had her sent up for three months once."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRUNKEN SAILOR'S STORY.

"DEN it hain't best she knows yer!" assured Scrimpy. "Ef she was ter give yer away ter de gang, dey'd all jump fer yer ter once, an' youse w'u'dn't stan' no show at all. Say, der barkeep' is onter us!"

Dan had observed the barkeeper looking that way, so he promptly caught the gamin by the shoulder and dragged him toward the bar, saying:

"Come you along! Him I will ask. Perhaps of Carlos he may know."

Reaching the bar, he demanded of the low-browed ruffian who was tending it:

"My brother, Carlos—you know him? You see him come here, senor? Him I no can find. Sailors we are, who do come to this port in a Spanish ship. My brother he do go away somewhere in this great city; I fear he be kill, for him I no find at all. You see him, senor?"

"I don't know anyting 'bout yer brother," growled the barkeeper. "How d'yer s'pose I know 'bout him?"

"Ah, senor, he was one great drinker-r-r. Liquor he do love—dancing he do love—be-e-autiful girl he do love. All here you have; I thought he might come."

"Well, I don't know not'ing 'bout him. W'at d'you drink?"

"Rum, senor. At the table there I will sit. Carlos he may come in. Senor, drink at my charge. See—money I do have. Pay for all I will. *Por Dios!* Money is nothing!"

He flung some money on the bar, and then made his way to the table, where liquor was soon brought him. He explained to the waiter that the newsboy was showing him round, as he did not know the city, and so Scrimpy was allowed to remain.

"Youse plays der game well," cautiously declared the boy. "All der same, you showed too much stuff w'en you made der bluff 'bout yer brudder. Dey'll spot yer fer pickin'."

"In which case they may find me a hard chicken to pick," replied Dan.

Dan had purposely taken a seat near the table where sat the toughs, Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson. He was able to catch some of their talk during lulls in the distressing music, but he found they were talking of matters that in no way interested him.

Red Mag finished her beer and was dragged onto the floor by a sullen-browed young fellow. After a little, the waltz came to an end.

By this time Murphy and Gibson had their heads very close together, and were talking cautiously. Dan was only able to catch an incautious word now and then, but he was sure the word "job" was repeated more than once. However, that was of no importance, as the fellows were notorious crooks, and might be planning some raid, instead of talking about anything that had occurred.

Finally the music struck up again and the dancing began once more.

Dan had disposed of his liquor by secretly

emptying it into a spittoon, and he ordered some more, knowing that was the way to keep his place without creating suspicion.

Barely had the dancing begun again when Dan saw a new-comer enter by the private way. This individual was apparently a sailor, and he seemed to have a heavy "cargo" aboard, for he walked with some difficulty. He was a well-bronzed fellow, of good build and not at all bad-looking; but it was apparent at a glance that he indulged in intoxicants more freely than was for his good.

Making his way to the bar, the sailor secured a drink. Then he looked around till his eyes rested on the disguised detective. Straightway he came rolling and pitching toward the table at which the ferret was seated.

"Hello, mate!" he cried in a familiar way. "You're rigged out fit to kill, shiver my timbers if ye hain't! You hain't no native of this glorious land of Hail Columby."

"Santa Maria! It is the truth you do say. I am no Yengee."

"Well, the Yankees are top cocks of the walk, blow me blind if they hain't! I'd rather have one good Yankee tar than a dozen Dago Malays, that's what's the matter with me! If you want to pick that up, pick away!"

Dan looked as ugly as he could, but said in a very smooth voice.

"Senor American should not take Pedro Montez for a Malay. Santissima! Them I do hate!"

"Ho! ho! ho!" chuckled the drunken sailor, his face beaming with genuine delight. "May I be keel-hauled if I didn't touch you in a soft spot! Say, you're Spanish?"

"I am a Cuban, senor."

"Better still! Your face hain't so very bad for one of such a dark complexion, an' I rather like your eyes. A Cuban! Well, well, well! Cuba is quite a little island!"

"It is a great country, senor."

"Oh, I suppose you people from there think so, but I've tramped all over it and I don't call it any particular great shakes. All the same, there are some beautiful girls there."

"The most beautiful in all the world, senor!"

"Blow me if I don't believe you're right!" admitted the intoxicated tar. "That makes me think of a little adventure I had there. Here's a chair. Say, I like you better the more I see of you. Drink with me! I'll tell you about that adventure. Only time Jack Backstay ever was in love. I'm Jack. What'll you have?"

Dan took beer, hoping the sailor would order the same, for he saw Jack Backstay had already swallowed more strong drink than was for his good. But Jack stared at Dan in astonishment.

"Beer?" he echoed, inquiringly. "Say, mate, is that your caliber? You look a better man. Oh, you don't mean beer! That wash is fit for Dutchmen and babies. Let the kid there have the beer; you take some rum with me."

"Already have I drunk all the rum that is good for me this night," replied Dan. "If more I do take, drunk may I be. No, senor; beer I have said."

The sailor rapped vigorously on the table.

"A rum and a beer," he said to the waiter.

Then he turned to the disguised detective.

"Yes, she was a beauty," he declared, seeming to think he had been telling Dan about some one. "She was the rip-stavin'est Spanish gal I ever clapped my peepers onter. Her eyes was dark as ink, her teeth white as pearl, her cheeks red as roses. I hain't no poet feller, but if I was, I'd have a big job on my hands to describe her. Dash my topknots if she wasn't a daisy from keel to topmast! And she a Cuban!"

"It was on the old Sarah Condon then. She was layin' in at Havana for her cargo. Old Bibby was cap'n; I was his first officer. I was a young feller in them days, an' my blood was hot. The first time I set eyes on Inez, she clean took me by storm and swept my deck clear. I was a goner, and I knew it."

"Say, mate, I do like them eyes of yours! You'd oughter been born an American. Yankee Doodle's ther greatest country on top ther earth!"

"What was I tellin' ye. Oh, yes! Well, I found a way to let her know how I was smashed all up over her. I had learned she was havin' some kind of a time with her old mother, who was actually jealous of her. Yes, sir—jealous! The old lady had cocked her eye toward a certain high-cock-a-lorum with straps on his shoulders, but the high-cock-a-lorum had cocked his eye toward the daughter. The old lady was a widder, but she felt inclined to indulge in matrimony again if she could get the duffer she wanted, but she was mighty particular."

"Here's our stuff. Waiter, put this in your pocket for future use. You may need it some time. Money hain't bad stuff to have round yer clothes."

"Here's long life and a smooth voyage. Down she goes. Ah, that's the stuff that takes the barnacles off a man's throat! Maybe it puts another nail in his coffin, but a short life and a merry one, says Jack Backstay. The boys all call me Roving Jack. I've been all over."

"The old woman? Well, she was a beaut! She didn't look much older than her daughter, and she was just as plump an' fascinatin' an'

bewitchin' as she could be. Fu'st time I seen her I thought it was Inez. If I hadn't never seen Inez, I'd been dead smashed on the old lady! It was true—she really was jealous of the gal."

"I dunno's I can tell just how I got to know the gal; it don't matter anyhow. But I got there. Yankees have a way of doin' that. Then we met secretly, for her mother was dead set against Americans. Inez was all broke up; so was I. That gal's kisses'd break up a block of granite!"

"Dunno why I'm tellin' you this, mate, blow me if I do! I don't usually talk 'bout it. S'pose it must be your eyes. Say, if them hain't honest eyes, I've lost my beari'n's."

"But the story. Talk about happiness! Well, mate, I was walkin' the upper deck of glory! I never was so happy in all my life before—and I've never been sence. She used to wind them plump little arms around my neck and whisper how she loved me with all her soul. I'd gone through fire and water for her then!"

"Perhaps I may get a little excited tellin' this, shipmate, but don't you mind. It won't last. I'll be all over it by the time I've reached the end of the voyage. It's an old cruise I'm goin' over in my mind. I've just slipped my cable and caught the breeze that is taking me back over the sea of remembrance. I'll drop anchor all right at the end."

"You know what a Cuban night is. Why, if they have such weather in Glory they are runnin' in luck! The moonlight, the silver sea, the soft breeze, the sweetness of the flowers! W'en I think of it it jest stirs my old soul all up with a kind of a wild longing that I can't describe. And them was the kind of nights we spent together."

"Well, mate, you may be able to imagine my feelin's as I saw our time there drawin' ter an end, but I'm blowed head on if I b'lieve ye can! It nighly set me crazy ter think of leavin' Inez! An' w'en I mentioned it ter her—"

"I'll never fergit that night! I told her the Sarah Condon sailed in three days an' I went with her. I told her we'd hev ter part. She was crazed; she swore it'd kill her. On her knees she begged me not to leave her. Then, w'en she knew I'd got ter go, she snatched out a dagger an' tried ter drive it inter her heart! I'd oughter let her done it, mate! Don't start. I'm talkin' straight. It was a serpent dagger, she tried ter use on herself—a knife with the blade all wavy like, an' ther head of a snake down at the back end. That snake was like her—like Inez! It's eyes were red, an' I afterward saw the red light in her eyes; its mouth was open ter strike, and she afterward tried to strike me."

"What's the matter, mate? Shiver my timbers! you look excited! Your eyes fairly glisten! You look like a man that's caught the first sight of land after a long cruise. Say, what is the matter, mate?"

"Nothing, senor—nothing at all," declared the detective, as calmly as possible.

CHAPTER V.

JACK BACKSTAY CONTINUES.

WELL might Detective Dan show signs of excitement. Roving Jack had described the very knife with which Colonel Wayne was killed—that knife or one like it.

It was a strange thing to say the very least.

Dan thrust a hand into the folds of his sash to make sure the singular serpent blade of murder was still there.

It was safe.

"Go on with the story, senor," bowed the disguised ferret. "It be very fascinate—great interest. Ah, senor, I do love to hear one talk who my Cuba knows! Madre de Dios! it is the sweet land—the sunny! Its women are be-e-aautiful!"

"But treacherous!" Jack Backstay quickly declared—"treacherous as serpents!"

Dan scowled.

"Not all, senor. Be just. No man do like to hear the women of his country speak of like that."

"That's right!" nodded the sailor, bluffly. "Stick by ther wimmen, mate! Hurrah fer ther wimmin! Blow a man who won't stan' by ther wimmin of his own country, say I! I like your style, shipmate—like it more and more! You'd make a stavin' good Yankee if yer face wasn't so dashed near the color of a nigger's. Now, don't get r'iled at that! I'm honest—I'm square. I don't care a heave what color yer skin is, so long as her heart's white."

"Drink again—have some more. Why, say, you hain't got away with all your beer yet! That hain't right. Roll it on, man, and have her filled again. Shiver my spars! you'r not half loaded yet! A man needs a good cargo aboard to feel comfortable like. Now, I have just taken enough for ballast. I've got to roll in a heap more before I get a regular cargo."

"Hey, waiter, this way. More of the same. What was it? Well, I'm blamed! Do you ask me that? I'm a clean American seaman—that's what! Rum, sir—rum, I say! It's vile stuff you have here, but it's better than none."

Scrimpy had remained silent up to this point, but, being brought up in the slums of the great

city, he had acquired a taste for beer, and he now piped up:

"Say, Mister Sailor, where do I come in?"

"Hey?" cried Jack, in amazement, staring at the dirty face and bright eyes at the side of the table. "You confounded young rat! You are addressin' your s'perior officer, sir! Be more respectful, or keel-haul me if I don't put you in irons! This looks like mutiny!"

"It is," grimly declared the gamin. "I want you to take a tip dat I'm in dis wid bote feet. Dat's w'at's der matter. If dere's beer goin' round, den I takes me share. See?"

Jack bent forward and stared hard at the street Arab.

"See!" he echoed. "Well, I can see without the glass, sir! I can see a face that needs a good scrub. See! What do you take me for, you insolent young rascal? W'at do you want?"

"Beer."

"Beer?"

"Dat's w'at."

"Well, I'm jiggered—yes, sir, I'm jiggered! Beer! Youngker, go home and tell yer mammy ter spank ye!"

"Oh, come off!" was Scrimpy's saucy retort. "I hain't got no mammy—never had! I'm me own boss. See? I want youse to understan' I'm in dis, fer I'm goin' der rounds wid dis mug. We are takin' in der town. Dis is our table, an' we didn't ask none of you ter sit down here. See? If youse come in so bloody free, jest put up fer der beer fer dis chick. Dat's goin' ter save a pile of trouble."

Jack lay back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Well, I do like that!" he declared. "You'll make a man some day, if you live to grow up! Waiter, bring the boy a mug of beer. Ther stuff hain't good fer him, but he's got a throat for it."

"W'at was I tellin'?" This head wind took me off on the wrong tack. Oh, yes—Inez. Well, she was wild—that's the word, sir, wild! I saw she was desperate! She told me her mother had threatened to kill her because Shoulder Straps seemed dead stuck on her. The old lady had a temper like a coal-chisel."

"Well, I was 'way down in the low sweeps. I didn't know w'at in blazes I was goin' ter do. I didn't want ter leave the gal any more than she wanted me ter, but how could I help it? I thought of desertin'. Then Inez said she couldn't stay at home—she must git away. She begged me ter git her off. I had kept her from usin' the knife on herself, and now I must take care of her."

"I'm an old man now, mate—I'm older than I look. You wouldn't take me for more than fifty, but I'll never see sixty again. All the same, I am good for several more cruises. If I'd allus let drink alone, I might be still better. Blow me, if I don't b'lieve I was cut out to live a clean hundred years! But short an' sweet has allus been my motter, so here I be."

"But I'm driftin'. I was tellin' ye how that gal got her grapplin'-hooks onter me an' took me by storm. I was raked clean, fore an' aft, spars gone, rudder gone an' a big hole knocked right in my heart. She crept in an' stopped that hole, so I was able to keep afloat. But w'at was I goin' ter do?"

"Mate, that was a hard question. It kept me from shuttin' my peepers nights. At last, I hit on a desperate scheme. Ther steward was dead in with me. I had saved the feller from swallowin' too much water once w'en he tumbled overboard, havin' on a load of Old Jamaica. He didn't fergit that, an' he says, says he: 'Jack, if I kin ever do anythin' fer ye, jest call on me. This right arm is yours, if yer want it, mate.'"

"That's ther kind of a shipmate ter have! He stood by his word, too. Poor Dick! He made food for ther fish years ago! He went down in the Indian Ocean—that is his body. But he was white. He wasn't no angel, shipmate, but he was a man. If there's any hereafter—an' my old mother used ter say so—Dick Lamb deserves the best lay-out there. He wouldn't be no man to call fer a harp an' a crown, Dick wouldn't, but if they had any good honest work ter do, he'd stan' ready ter bear a han' an' do his part. If they eat over there, he could show 'em some pints in ther cookery line."

"Well, I went to Dick. 'Dick,' I says, says I, 'I'm in a howlin' scrape.' 'Jack,' he says, says he, 'you're in love.' I didn't deny it; I made a clean sweep. 'Mate,' says I, 'w'at am I goin' ter do?' 'Jack,' says he, 'take my advice an' cut adrift from this gal.'"

"But I wasn't takin' that kind of advice. I had a scheme. I meant to get Inez clean off ter America. I made a sweep of the whole thing, tellin' Dick I wanted him ter help me. I was fer stowin' her away."

"'She'll never do it,' he says. 'She won't hev the grit.' 'You don't know her,' I says. 'She'll do it.' An' she did. We smuggled her aboard one dark night, an' we managed to keep her out of sight till the Sarah Condon was well under way an' thirty-six hours out. Then ther old man got a point that there was a stowaway aboard. He was in a bad temper anyway, an' he swore he'd make it hot for any blanked stow-away. Then he ordered a search. Dick gave Inez the word, and she came out without bein' found by ther men."

"Here, mate, here's our grog. Here's ther beer for you, youngker. Blow me tight! they've been long enough in gettin' it round! Waiter, I'm a good customer. Didn't I give you a good tip the other time? Say, you must have beat up against a head wind or struck the wrong current. It's taken you long enough to sail clean round the Horn. I hain't no kicker, but I know what's what."

"Well, here's luck and a clean log. I'm feelin' better. It goes, if it is hard stuff. Down your beer, boy, an' look smilin'. The mug's half your size."

He paused long enough to toss off the drink at a swallow, and wipe his lips with the back of his hand. It was plain he delighted to hear himself talk, and Dan allowed him to ramble on, thinking that a better way than to ask many questions, and possibly spoil everything by a snow of inquisitiveness. The detective's greatest fear was that Jack would get too drunk to talk before he reached the end of his narrative. However, the sailor seemed no more intoxicated than when he first entered the room.

"By Neptune! you do look interested, mate!" half-laughed Jack Backstay. "I can't beat round them eyes. They are keeners."

"What was my latitude at last observation? I recollect. She had just showed up. Yes, she went straight to the old man. Say, she was educated, and she could speak United States pretty straight. She flung herself on his mercy—she declared herself ther stowaway. The old man nearly had a fit."

"Well, I reckoned the game was up, for I knew Cap'n Bradwick. He was a crusty old sinner, and he steered clear of wimmen. Had a wife an' young 'uns, you see. S'pose he tried to keep out of temptation."

"What a shock it was to him! He didn't know w'at ter do. Inez told a pretty story, that was 'bout half-true an' half-lie. She knowed just how much truth ter tell, an' she could lie after a most delightful fashion. On, that gal was a revelation!"

"The old man listened. He'd got control of his face, an' he looked like stone. I wasn't 'round, but I heard it all from her lips afterwards. She played her part fer all it was worth, but she thought the game lost. Then she got desperate, an' swore she'd drown herself if he sent her back. Still he declared he'd do so the fu'st ship he sighted that was bound the right way."

"But he didn't. I wasn't in this at all, you understand, shipmate. The old man wanted to know how she got aboard, but she told him a story that let me an' Dick out. He never s'pected us. I had hard work not ter give myself clean away more then once, but Brad never s'pected ther truth till after he touched Yankee Doodle soil."

"I have tole ye how soft an' slick Inez was. Well, she worked the old man. Of course he couldn't set her ter reefin' sail or tarrin' ropes, so he had ter take her 'long as a passenger. He gave up his berth an' she made the most of ther cabin, but he used ter sneak in an' talk with her by ther hour. It wasn't long before she had him dead smashed."

"Then my blood began ter b'ile. I reckoned she was too free with him, an' I'd done somethin' desperate if 'tadn't bin fer Dick Lamb. He held me down. 'Belay, there, you lubber!' says he. 'Don't make a howlin' fool of yer-self! Can't you see she's woolin' him for ther voyage in? She don't keer a little fer the old boy, but she's makin' him think she's clean run down.'"

"That quieted me, but it was mighty hard ter know another man was sittin' round in ther cabin an' gittin' ther smiles and soft words that b'longed ter me. One night I kem pritty nigh murder, fer I found them leanin' over the leg-rail, an' ther old man had his arm around her waist."

"Well, I hain't goin' ter drag it out, mate. We kem in all safe an' Inez got her feet on Yankee soil. The minute I was paid off an' discharged, I made for her. Blow me blind, if the old man hadn't forked over a stake and found her some rooms! I found her settled for the time, but the second time I called Cap'n Bradwick found me there. Then there was blood in the air, for the old man took a tumble to himself. He attempted to run me down, but I was too much for him. He got the worst of it. I fired him down the stairs, and he must have been nigh a wreck when he touched bottom."

"Next day them rooms was to let once more. I'd taken Inez ter a different quarter."

CHAPTER VI.

JACK'S YARN CONCLUDED.

JACK BACKSTAY ceased speaking and drummed on the table with his fingers, a strange look on his face.

Dan was watching the sailor closely, and Scrimpy seemed interested.

The dancing continued at intervals, but the three at the little table seemed to have forgotten all about their surroundings.

The detective was impatient for the sailor narrator to come to the subject of the knife once

more without being led there. He knew this might not happen, but he hoped it would.

Scrimpy had swallowed his beer and was resting his chin on his hands, which, in turn, were resting on the table, one clinched above the other. It was a prematurely old face that topped those clinched and dirty paws. In some respects, the face looked as old as that of Roving Jack.

After a time, the sailor went on:

"I wasn't wealthy, mate, so I didn't take her to rooms as fine as them the old man had provided for her. That hurt her an' we had our first quarrel. I was lookin' to ther future, but she didn't think of that. I wanted to marry her, but she said she wasn't ready. I was a blowed fool!"

"Well, we made up and things sailed along well for a time. She had her jewels, but she hated to part with 'em. All the same, the time came right along when she had to bid good-by to some. I'd blowed in my pile."

"Then we both got desperate. She was furious because I didn't have money. One night she told me to go out and get some in some way. I asked how. She said fer me ter knock some fool on the head, if ther wasn't any other way. My God! Shipmate, you can never know the feelin' them words sent over me! Right then I saw the beautiful creature stripped of the mask that had hid the devil under it. She wasn't soft an' clinging any more. I saw some of the fiend that had made her mother so much feared."

"We went down. She had expected her mother would follow and try to take her back, but if ther old lady ever did, we didn't know of it. I tell you, we did git hard up one time, and then I went out on the street, havin' made up my mind ter foller Inez's advice 'bout gitin' money some way. But I didn't; I went back empty-handed, creepin' in w'en ther light of morning was showin' over ther eastern roofs."

"I found Inez sleepin', a smile on her face. She looked like an angel then, mate. I didn't look round, but I went straight to ther bed and knelt down 'side it. Then I kissed her. That woke her up an' she frowned w'en she saw me."

"Inez," I said, chokin' like, "I hain't brought back any money."

"She laughed! Yes—laughed! 'Well I've done better,' she said, an' she held a greenback under my nose. There was a figger 20 in the corner. I was jest knocked clean on my beam's end, mate."

"Where'd ye git it?" I asked. Then she laughed ag'in. It was a devilish laugh! 'Don't ask too many questions,' she said. Then she turned her back to me, sayin' there was grub an' wine on the table. Wine! Do ye hear? Wine! I felt like I had been struck by the nose of a big liner. Then there was hell in my heart!"

"Well, I hain't goin' ter tell ye w'at follered, only that I came nigh chokin' her dead. Once I thought she was gone, an' that frightened me. I rushed fer ther water, an' I got some of ther wine inter her. Then she came round. But she never forgot ner forgave."

"Well, we didn't want fer anything arter that, but it was the devil's traffic, mate—the devil's traffic brought in the money! I found out who was puttin' up. He was rich as mud—a young blood of the town. Fool he was! bigger fool I!"

"Are you followin' me, shipmate? I know I'm bouncin' an' rollin' like a rudderless bark. But the end is nigh—we've sighted port."

"It was a foul life to lead, that of livin' on the money she obtained. I hated myself, and more than once I swore to kill him—the other one—the rich fool! He didn't know of me—he didn't know such a being was in existence. I saw Inez was lost to me—lost to herself—forever lost! I was only a common seaman, he was a man of society. D'yer hear me, mate—society! I say, curse society! I hate society! What right has any man of money to set himself up as better than I? His money buys him ther place in society! It's all a howlin' show, sech as they have at ther theaters where they play take-off farces."

"But, I'm driftin' again. I can't seem ter keep meself down ter a dead level course."

"Well, it went on fer a while. I saw her growin' ter scorn me. Oh, it hurt—yes, it hurt! But what could I do? Nothing! We quarreled often. Pritty soon she told me she was goin' ter leave me fer good. I'd been drinkin' an' I struck her. I'd never done that if I hadn't been drinkin', mate. How her eyes blazed! She swore she'd hev' my life fer that blow, but I was too drunk ter understand she really meant it. But she did. That night I woke up ter find her bendin' over me with that cursed serpent knife in her fingers. I jest caught a glimp' of her, then she struck!"

"I'm alive; that's proof she didn't kill me. She meant ter do it, jest as hard. Look here at my neck, mate, where I roll the collar away. Ther's where she put that knife. If I hadn't squirmed aside a little, she'd plunked it right inter ther middle of my woosle, in which case it'd been good-by, Jack."

"I routed up an' grappled with her, the blood streamin' from my neck. That devilish knife was all red with my blood! She had ther

strength of a fiend, and I hed ter battle fer all I was worth. I saw it meant life or death fer me, so I done my level best."

"How her eyes blazed! I kin 'member 'em now. A hundred times I've dreamed of 'em sence that time. Ther dream has spiled a lot of good sleep fer me. Her lips were back, an' her white teeth glistened. In ther fight we knocked over an oil lamp, but we tussled on, an' didn't mind thet the lamp hed set ther curtains blazin'. Arter a time I got ther best of her. I throwed her down, an' she laid stunned on ther floor at my feet, that red knife still gripped in her fingers. I looked down inter her face as the risin' fire showed it, an' then I run from ther place. I didn't think I was leavin' her ter ther flames, mate—on my soul, I didn't! But I was 'feared of that critter, even though I hed mastered her."

"Well, this is ther end of the cruise. Of course I never had anythin' more ter do with Inez. I've never made a fool of myself over any female sence, shipmate, an' I never will. I've allus made ther most of life, an' I don't reckon I've got many more years ahead of me."

"Say, have some more grog? Of course you will! It hain't manners ter refuse. My throat is as dry as the Great Desert. I've talked so much it feels like a burr."

"Oh, senor—one question I would ask."

"Let her drive."

"Did the fiend—the be-e-e-autiful fiend die in the fier-r-r? You tell me that."

"Oh, no! she didn't die there. I believe she was burnt some an' was lugged out by others in ther buildin'. They took her to a hospital, where she was nussed back ter livin'. But I didn't linger ter see how she came out. W'en that happened, I was on a merchantman away round on the other side of ther world. I didn't banker ter see her any more. She took an oath ter have my life, an' she'd kept that oath if she'd lived."

"Oh! ah! Then dead she is, senor?"

"Dead as a dried herrin'."

"How she die?"

"On, she went to ther dogs, mate. I don't know ther hull story. She lived on her rich fool for a year or so, an' then they rowed it an' he flung her over. Ther fling sent her clean smack ter the bottom. She drank like sin, an' drink soon gets the best of wimmen, ye know. Th-y buried her in ther Potter's Field. Poor gal! Had she bin straight, she'd been Mrs. Jack Backstay at this minute, an' I'd worked my fingers off fer her. But she's gone—gone!"

"And the snake knife?"

"I don't know 'bout that. Ther last I saw of it, it was gripped in her fingers as she lay in ther light of ther fire thet was burnin' our little room."

"And, senor, the other—the reech one who lead her away? Of him what?"

"Oh, I didn't keep track of him."

"His name—you know it?"

"Yes."

"You remembare?"

"Like a book."

"It was—what?"

"Wayne—Andrew Wayne was his name, mate."

CHAPTER VII.

DAN SPOILS THE GAME.

It was with difficulty the detective could conceal his excitement. Had the rarest of good luck led him to a man who could put him on a trail that would fully explain the motive of Colonel Wayne's murder and bring the perpetrator of the deed to justice?

Roving Jack little dreamed what a commotion his reply had created in the breast of the Spanish-appearing listener.

"Wayne, senor?" echoed the ferret. "Is not he in some way connect with the army?"

"Blowed if I know! Tell ye I hain't kept track of him. I've got all over that old 'fair, years ago, mate, though ther tellin' of it *did* work me up a little. I'm older—older! Now I know there is wimmen an' wimmen in this great big worl'. No one female ever turned this head sence that time, an' I've knowed slathers of 'em. Hooray fer ther wimmen!"

Roving Jack cast his eyes about the room in search for some alluring-appearing damsel, but the expression of his face showed disappointment.

"All look like they was to a funeral," he muttered. "Keel-haul me if I ever seen such a mummy crowd!"

"You did see this Senor Wayne?" persisted Dan.

"Oh, 'way back there w'en I was a fresh."

"You have never seen him since?"

"No, an' I've never wanted ter."

"You are sure the senorita be dead, senor?"

"Sure? Course I'm sure! I know it, an' that settles it. W'at are you drivin' at?"

Jack looked at Dan inquiringly, seeming to realize for a moment that it was singular a stranger should take so much interest in his narrative and the characters he had described.

"Por Dios! I think maybe I have see her."

At this the sailor laughed.

"Seen her? Well, I guess not, messmate!"

You're not more than thirty, so she kicked the bucket before *your* time. Why, if she'd lived, she'd been sixty now—an old woman! I wonder how she'd looked if she had lived?"

"Ah, senior, your pardon you must grant. I be very interest. She was a Cuban; I am a Cuban. Her name do you remember?"

"I have told ye—it was Inez."

"But the other—the rest, senior?"

"Oh, I don't remember. There was a great long string of it."

"Try—try to remembare!"

Jack showed some signs of annoyance, but he made the attempt to remember the name, and he soon said:

"I guess it was Codell or Codelva, or something of that sort. Shiver my timbers if I ketch the exact run of it!"

"Was it Cordova?"

"There she be, mate!" cried the sailor, bringing his clinched fist down on the table. "Dash my binnacle lights, if I understand how you fell afoul of it in that way! Say, you know more of this than you're lettin' on! Come, come, mate! none of that! Do the square by an old tar!"

Dan started to protest, but Jack would not hear it, and the detective saw he must invent some kind of a story.

"Well, senior, the truth be I know of the Cordovas. I know the story of the girl runaway. That be all."

"Is that it? Well, did the old lady foller her?"

"*Caramba*, no! She be only too glad to have the girl out of her way."

"Did she ketch high-cock-a-lorum Shoulder Straps?"

"No, senior; he do *not* marry her. He only care for the girl."

"Well, I wish he'd got her," declared Jack, grimly. "She'd made it warm for him. She had the face and form of an angel and the heart of a devil!"

For some minutes Bark Murphy had been watching the sailor. Murphy was in an ugly mood, and he was wondering how he could start a quarrel with the old tar. The chance was given him by Red Mag.

"Come on, me old blossom!" cried the girl, coming up to where Jack sat at the table—"come on an' hev a trip wid me!"

Jack looked her over critically.

"Scuse me," he retorted. "I hain't dancin' this hitch. All ther same, I'm treatin'. Set right down here an' hev w'at ye orders. I'm payin' ther bill."

Mag scowled.

"Why don't ye dance?" she demanded. "Don't yer tink I'm style enough fer ye?"

"Oh, you're style for the best," laughed Jack. "You're a hull schooner of style, you be!"

The tough girl clinched her fists and placed them on her hips, setting her arms akimbo.

"Dunno's I likes der way youse said dat," came harshly from her lips. "If youse hain't dancin', w'at yer in here fer? Ye hain't one of der gang, anyway."

Bark Murphy was listening intently, Hank Gibson being on the floor with a partner. When Gibson came round that way in the course of the dance, Murphy caught his eye and made a signal. Gibson promptly dropped out of the dance and approached his comrade.

"W'at's der how-how?" he asked.

"Spot der old mug in der sailor rig, talken wid Mag? He's game."

"W'at's Mag up ter?"

"She jest asked him would he dance."

"An' he don't?"

"No. He asked would she drink."

"She don't guzzle?"

"Nary guz."

"W'at yer goin' ter do?"

"Reckon we'd best straddle der old mug."

"How 'bout der nigger-face?"

"He hain't in it."

"Dey seems ter be tergether."

"Dey was strangers till a little ago. Der Spanish gent kem in wid der kid, den der ole mug kem in arter. Dey're bote sailors, so dey drifted tergedder. See?"

"Well, dey may fight fer each odder."

"You don't ketch no Spanish bloke fightin' fer a Yankee."

"Well, w'at'll we do?"

"Jest you foller my lead," and Murphy arose from his seat.

It happened that Double-voice Dan was "on." He had been keeping an eye on Murphy, and he saw the signal that called Gibson from the floor. By the two toughs' manner of glancing toward Roving Jack and Red Mag, the ferret became convinced trouble was brewing.

Scrimpy had been keeping his eyes wide open, also, and now he whispered to Dan:

"We'd best take a sneak, now, boss. Dere's goin' ter be a bazoo-razzle. Der sailor-bloke's been spotted an' der gang's goin' ter do him. We may git ourselves hurted if we hangs round."

But, Dan did not seem to notice the gamin. Beneath the level of the table his hands were making sure his weapons were ready for instant use. Jack Backstay was of importance to him, and he did not propose to see the sailor "done for" in that den.

Scrimpy thought the detective had not heard his words, and he tugged at Dan's sleeve.

"Are youse goin' ter take a tumble, boss?" he somewhat excitedly demanded. "Dere's blood in der air! We'd best skip lively."

"You can skip," softly answered Dan, without looking at the boy. "I am going to stand by Jack."

"Holy Jinks!" gasped Scrimpy. "Dat's clean suicide, pard! It can't be youse knows der Morphine Fiends! Dey're bad!"

"Go!" commanded Downing. "Get out while you have a chance."

"Not a get, boss. Ef you stays I stays," was the gamin's resolute assurance. "I'm standin' by youse, me lord, as long as dere's any skin left on me knuckles. Dat's der kind of a chap *dis* chicken is!"

Dan was not exactly in a state to appreciate the humor of the situation.

Bark Murphy swaggered up to Roving Jack and slapped the sailor heavily on the shoulder.

"Say, youse!"

"Are you aware I have a claim on that shoulder?" inquired Jack, looking up at Murphy.

"W'at yer want?"

"Didn't dis gal ask would ye dance wid her?"

"Mebbe so."

"I don't take none of dat bluff. See? Jest give a straight answer, me friend."

"Well, then, it ain't any of your son of gun's business!" was the incautious retort.

Murphy glared at Jack, and thrust out his under jaw.

"D'yer know me, cully?"

"No; an' I'll be keel-hauled ef I want ter!"

"Dat's sass!"

"Then swaller it an' let it stop yer throat! You talk too much with your mouth, stranger. Some day it will go all to pieces. Better laul it up in dry dock an' give it a chance ter rest."

Murphy and Gibson exchanged glances, while Red Mag laughed outright.

"He's gittin' der best of yer, Hack," snickered the girl.

"He don't know der kind of a man he's talkin' ter," asserted Murphy, spitting on his hands. "I'm goin' ter do him one."

Jack promptly arose.

"It's a row you're lookin' fer, is it?" he cried. "Well, you'll find Rovin' Jack ready ter 'commerdate. If there's anything I do love, it's a good square fight! Come on, stranger! Shove your helm hard down and make straight for me! You'll find me right here when you arrive!"

It was now Hack Gibson's time to take a hand. He swaggered forward, demanding:

"Look here; w'at you raisin' all dis row fer? We're peaceable in here, an' we don't want no mugs ter come in an' kick up a muss like dis. Now, you git out or we'll fire ye. See?"

That thoroughly aroused the sailor.

"Throw me out! Beard of Neptune! Throw me out! Oh, come an' try it! I'll make it lively work for you! Don't think I'm no good 'cause I've bin cruisin' roun' fer a long time. Jest sail right at me! Here I am!"

Jack danced about excitedly. Murphy saw his chance and leaped at the old sailor's back fastening a grip on his throat. Backstay was nearly knocked off his feet by the assault from behind, and Gibson sprang at him in front. Together they would not have a great deal of trouble in getting the best of the incautious and half boozy seaman.

Right there Dan Downing sailed in. With a shout that rung through the room like the blast of a steam whistle, he vaulted over the table. One of his fists struck Hack Gibson a blow that sent him down in a heap, and then he tore Murphy and the sailor apart, sending the tough reeling backward.

"I believe I will take a hand in this business," he calmly observed.

Scrimpy Stubbs leaped on the table and took a shuffle of delight.

"Hooray!" he squealed. "Dat's der kind of a crowd we are! Come an' see us, you pipe-hitters!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD HAG.

THE two toughs were taken by surprise. In fact, Dan's blow nearly knocked Gibson senseless.

Red Mag gave a whoop of amazement.

The music ceased and the dancing stopped.

A row was started, and that was of the utmost interest to the frequenters of the place.

With a snarling exclamation, Bark Murphy recovered his balance and snatched out a knife. Then he lunged toward the disguised detective.

But he suddenly stopped.

A revolver appeared in Double-voice Dan's hand, the muzzle being turned toward the furious tough.

"Chain up, you cur, or I will drill you!" came grimly from the ferret's lips.

"Dat's biz!" howled Scrimpy, joyously.

"Dat't fellow's taken out a license ter drill! He kin do it in style! Come up an' hev yer system ventilated! Oh-wow-wow! We's der boys!"

Gibson scrambled to his feet, and Murphy gave a peculiar cry that brought a dozen of the male dancers rushing to his side.

It was the signal of the Bridge Gang—a cry not unlike the call of the famous Whyos. No combination of letters can give a correct idea of the sounds, but "aye-ah" is as near it as possible, the "aye" being given a shrill sound that would be heard at a great distance if shouted loudly.

Dan saw the rush, and his left hand also sought a revolver, for he could shoot with one hand as well as the other, or both at once, if necessary.

"It's goin' ter be hot, boss!" excitedly warned Scrimpy.

"I'm with ye, messmate!" declared Roving Jack. "I don't fergit this, blow me blind if I do! I thought you was a white man; now I know it! You're ther clean article. I'd like to ship with you."

In the excitement of the moment he had not observed how Dan had abandoned his outlandish manner of speaking.

Jack was not unarmed, as he quickly showed by drawing a dirk and a revolver.

"We'll do our best to make it hot fer 'em," he said.

The gang had drawn weapons, too, but in every case they were knives or "jimmies." They were not anxious for too much shooting, fearing to have the police come down on the place.

The Bridge Gang was under police condemnation, and their breaking up had been ordered at Headquarters. They knew of this, and so they had been laying low for a long time.

"Dese blokes are spies!" shouted Bark Murphy. "Dey're in here ter spot us!"

"Dat Spanish-dressed mug hain't no Spaniard!" asserted Hack Gibson.

"He talks der straight United States," affirmed Red Mag.

"We's jest got ter do 'em!" declared Murphy. "Dey mustn't git out of here!"

"Keep your distance unless you are anxious to figure conspicuously in a funeral!" commanded Dan. "If I commence to shoot, there will be a thinning out of the Bridge Gang."

"He knows us!"

"Dat setties it!"

"Dey're spies, sure!"

"An' der kid?"

"Well, I'm in it!" assured Scrimpy. "I'm runnin' wid dis crowd, you bet yer bood! If youse downs dem, you's got ter down me!"

He struck a belligerent attitude that was really comical, but no one thought of laughing then.

"Go fer 'em!" shouted Murphy. "Down 'em!"

"Come on, all of ye!" cried Jack Backstay. "We'll do ther town a good job by polishin' off this crowd."

"Never say *go*," advised Dan. "Always say *come*. If you take the lead, they will follow. I'll guarantee to finish you the first one I attend to. That's fair."

The detective hoped to hold the gang at bay while he devised some plan of escape. He knew they were in a very bad scrape, but he had no thought of allowing the gang to kill him, and he did not wish Roving Jack killed. The sailor was of importance, he fancied, to his lost case—very important.

Suddenly there came an interruption. A savage scream rung through the dance-room—a scream that was blood-chilling. Then into the center of the floor darted a figure that was indescribable.

Was it a human being? Yes, and a woman!

The figure was rounded and crouching. It was covered with a mass of rags. Out from beneath the mass of tangled white hair that fell down over her face gleamed a pair of fiery eyes, and her lips were drawn back to expose some yellow teeth. The face was old and wrinkled, and it looked like that of a fiend incarnate. From beneath the shawl that hung from her rounded shoulders were thrust some yellow skinny arms. The hands were like the claws of a beast.

This horrible-looking creature was snarling, and spitting, and her lips were covered with foam. She seemed like a person in the last stage of hydrophobia.

"It's Old Sal!"

"She's havin' another tantrum!"

"Look out for her!"

"She's dangerous!"

"Give her lots of room!"

"The woman is mad!" exclaimed Dan.

"As a hornet!" promptly added Jack Backstay.

"Ha! ha! ha!" screamed the hag, her laughter being like that of a fiend. "Look at me—look! Am I young? Am I beautiful? Ha! ha! ha! Once I was—once I was! You're afraid of me! Well, I like that—I like it! You think I can never be young again! Don't lie! That is what you think! Fools, fools, fools! I hold the secret—the great secret! One has only to die to be young again!"

"Holy Jinks!" gasped Roving Jack.

"What is it?" asked Dan.

"That voice."

"What of it?"

"I've heard it before, messmate!"

"Did you ever see the woman before?"

"Dunno. Them eyes—see how they blaze? My God! them are Inez Cordova's eyes!"

The old hag started.

"What's that?" she screamed. "What did I hear? Who spoke?"

With astonishing swiftness, she darted toward the sailor and the detective. The crowd fell back before her rush.

"Mary Mother!" came from those lips, the breath causing the hanging white hair to flutter before it. "What do I see? An old man, but I know that face! I have seen it before! You are dead, dead! What right have you to be alive?"

The sailor's bronzed face had become ghastly, and he was visibly trembling.

"An' you, Inez!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Is it possible you live an' have come ter this?"

A snarl of savage fury was his answer, and the old hag sprung at him. She would have caught Jack Backstay by the throat with her claw-like hands had not Dan Downing's foot tripped her. She went down with a crash and lay as if stunned.

Seeing the opportunity, Bark Murphy shouted. "Now's ther time! Down wid the spies, lads!"

Then, just as the gang was on the point of a rush, a female voice at the other side of the room shrieked:

"Der perlice! der perlice! Dey're comin'! Run, run!"

Then there was a chorus of shrieks from the girls, and a stampede followed. Somebody yelled:

"Douse der glim!"

Out went the lights!

Scrimpy managed to get hold of Dan, and the gamin fairly dragged the detective aside.

"Dis way!" he whispered. "I knows how ter make der sneak!"

Dan allowed the boy to guide him through the darkness, and within five minutes he was in a dark alley.

The detective and his assistant had escaped from the trap, thanks to a little trick of Dan's. The detective was a wonderful ventriloquist—hence his name—and he had raised the cry that the police were coming. That had caused the stampede, and Dan had been guided out of the trap by Scrimpy.

But where was Roving Jack?

"Sh'u'dn't wonder if dat cove was done fer," soberly observed Scrimpy.

CHAPTER IX.

SCRIMPY IN HARNESS.

THE coroner's inquest resulted in the conclusion that "Colonel Andrew Wayne came to his death by wounds inflicted by a knife in the hands of a person unknown to the jury."

Of course Detective Dan was on hand and gave his testimony, the strange knife being inspected by each of the jurymen. But the inquest failed to throw any light on the mystery of the murder. The object for the deed seemed hidden. It did not appear to have been robbery, for nothing was missing from the house or from the person of the murdered man.

It was needless, perhaps, to say that Dan Downing had some thoughts and theories which he did not make known to the coroner. Since the murder he had learned some things which promised to lead him on a trail that would have made the liveliest kind of sensational reading for a newspaper, had any paper been lucky enough to learn all the facts of the case.

Colonel Wayne had been a very popular man, and the funeral was a grand affair. Something like a smile of scorn curled Dan's smooth lips as he witnessed the over-display of the occasion. Although naturally jolly and free when not attending to duty, the detective was inclined to be a trifle cynical at times.

Dan was more troubled than he felt willing to confess, for four persons whom he wished shadowed had utterly disappeared.

As for Jack Backstay, the detective feared the jolly sailor had made his last cruise. He thought it extremely doubtful if Roving Jack came out of the dive dance-hall alive. He regretted that this was probably so, for he had suddenly grown to look on the man as of great importance in the case.

But of still greater importance he believed the woman whom the Morphine Fiends had called "Old Sal." If she really was the Inez of long years ago, then she might have had some hand in the murder.

But, was she the Spanish maiden?

That was a question that puzzled the detective. Roving Jack had declared Inez dead, but he had also said the old hag's eyes were like those of the Spanish girl, and, indeed, had called her Inez.

And the woman had recognized the sailor!

Jack must have been deceived in believing the girl had died as described; therefore—Well, Dan meant to know the whole truth of the affair.

Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson were also laying low. Dan had felt justified in putting the police on the watch for the two toughs, for they were suspicious characters, anyway. But, even the police were unable to close in on Murphy and Gibson. They were sure the two crooks were still in the city, but they were keeping "shady."

Scrimpy Stubbs was at work for Dan, as the

detective had learned to trust the gamin since the night Stubbs stood by him in the dance-hall dive and piloted him out by an unused way.

The boy was unlearned in the way of book knowledge, but he was well read in the secrets and mysteries of the great city. He was naturally shrewd, and, under favorable circumstances, would make a smart man, for all of his early disadvantages. But if left to himself, he would be pretty sure to sink in the social scale till he became a crook and outlaw, as hundreds of just such street Arabs do become.

To Dan it was a wonder the lad had such a sense of right and wrong as he seemed to possess. It appeared that nature had implanted within him an aversion for anything that was not strictly square and honest.

It had always been Scrimpy's ambition to become a detective, and his delight at the prospect before him; after falling in with Double-voice Dan, was great, for Dan had promised to pay him well, and give him a start if he proved a reliable assistant.

"Well, boss, youse kin jest count on dis child!" asseverated Scrimpy, after listening to Dan's words. "I'm one of dem fellers w'at has deyre likes an' dislikes, but I buttoned ter you der first time I spotted yer. I knowed youse was der clean stuff, an' I says ter myself I'd stan' ter yer back t'rough t'ick an' t'in."

"Now, some chumps'd run w'en der row riz down in Beazly's der odder night, but I jest hung right dere till der lights dropped out, den I showed yer der way out of dere. I don't want ter brag, boss, but I don't t'ink you'd got out of dat hole if I hadn't stuck ter yer like I was a por'us plaster."

Dan laughed.

"Perhaps not, Scrimps," he confessed. "Anyway, I'm ready to give you all the honor you won. You did show clean grit in staying, and that is the right kind. You stick by me like that and you'll wear diamonds."

"Well, wouldn't I look well wearin' shiners! Oh, wow! Boss, dese are my Sunday togs!"

Then Dan took the boy to a ready-made clothing store and bought him a good suit of clothes. He fitted the ragged waif out from head to heels, and Scrimpy scarcely knew himself when he gazed at his reflection in a mirror.

"Well, dis is style!" he cried. "I'll be der boss swell mug of Avenue A! Git onter my jug." Then he strutted up and down the floor after the fashion of a Broadway dude, while Dan and the attending clerk laughed at his eccentric manner.

"Why, none of der kids won't know me!" declared Scrimpy. "Dey'll t'ink I'm der son of some furrin dook or count or Dutchman. You'll hear dem all singin': 'Dere Goes der Swell.' W'en I meets Jay Gould next time, I'll jest cut him dead—won't even look at him. It'll break der old pauper's heart. He'll go make his will an' die as soon as he signs it. So ye see I'll be doin' a great service fer der country."

But the gamin would not think of abandoning his old apparel.

"Dese duds'll come in handy in my business," he remarked, looking at Dan in a significant manner.

The detective took care to see that his *protege* had a good bath and was installed in comfortable quarters. Scrimpy's soul and stomach were delighted by a square meal at a respectable restaurant, and he was given some pocket money by Dan, who said:

"As long as I keep you in my service, your pay shall never be less than a dollar a day, and I will pay your board and lodging bill and furnish you with clothes. That will be equal to twelve dollars every week, at least. Is it satisfactory?"

"Well, I sh'u'd cough! Dat'll be better dan sellin' pape's fer what yer kin pick up. Boss, I'm stickin' ter youse an' makin' meself so mighty vallyable dat ye'll allus keep me."

"If you do that, I shall surely raise your wages when you deserve a raise."

"Reckon I'm on der high road ter be a millionaire! Never t'ought I'd strike sech a snap as dis."

So, while other things were occupying his attention, Dan set Scrimpy to search for Murphy and Gibson, also telling him to keep an eye open for the missing sailor or the old hag. The amateur detective reported every night to his employer, and, after three days of non-success, he began to feel disheartened.

"Say, boss; I hain't no good!"

"I don't understand."

"Well, I kinder t'ought I'd make a slappin' great detective, but I don't detect fer a hoot."

Dan laughed.

"You mean you are discouraged at your bad luck?"

"Bad luck—is dat w'at yer calls it? Well, I don't. I calls it foolishness. If I was half so sharp es I t'ought, I'd had dem fellers potte i b'fore dis."

"You must remember the police are looking for them, too, and have failed."

"Der perlice!" cried Scrimpy, with a fine gesture of scorn. "Might as well set a lot of putty men ter lookin' for der crooks! Why, boss, dead loads of dem coppers are in wid der sharks of dis town. Dey'll hustle a decent man

an' let der thieves and toughs loaf round der corners. I hain't dead in love wid der perlice, dough I s'pose we's got ter have 'em."

"You're a cynic, Scrimps."

"Say, now, dat hain't fair! Don't go ter callin' a feller names jest 'cause he hain't as smart as he t'ought he was!"

Again the detective laughed.

"There is time enough yet, my lad," he said, encouragingly. "Murphy and Gibson are probably laying low, and you may be able to spot them when they show their noses. If you do not, the police will, so don't be discouraged. Remember I have not been able to put my hands on the ones I am looking for. That sailor and the old woman have vanished completely."

"Well, I don't count on yer ever spottin' der jack any more, pard."

"You think—"

"Dat he was done fer right in Beazly's."

"Well, you may be right. I have watched the sailors' homes in the city, and he is not at any of them. I have been to every shipping office, and should he appear there, I will be notified."

"An' the old woman—I say, boss, don't folks allus die with hydryfoby?"

"Yes."

"Well, I reckon dat old gal had it."

"She was surely having some kind of a fit, but from some words I heard the gang utter, I am led to believe it was not an uncommon thing for her."

"Well, I'd rudder faced a lion dan her 'bout dat time."

"Don't get discouraged because you have not found your men yet, Scrimps. Keep right on searching till they are found or I tell you to stop. Remember, your pay goes right on just the same."

"Dat's jest w'at's der matter. I feel so blamed cheap takin' pay fer doin' no'ting."

"Oh, well!" laughed Dan; "you will get over that after you have been in the detective business long enough."

CHAPTER X.

THE FOUNDATION OF A "SENSATIONAL EXCLUSIVE."

THE very next day one of the morning papers came out with a "sensational exclusive" to the effect that Colonel Andrew Wayne had been killed by an old enemy, a Cuban whom he had rivaled in a love affair of years before.

To say the least, the story was a bold and daring one. It produced a great stir, though the dead man's friends immediately denounced it as a fake and declared the paper would have to suffer for its falsehood.

But in that story Detective Dan saw more than any one else. He believed the reporter had possessed something from which to construct the yarn. That the versatile pencil-pusher had shot wide of the mark he was confident, but his claim that Colonel Wayne had been killed by a Cuban convinced Dan the man knew something that might be of importance.

Having arrived at this conclusion, the detective resolved to have a talk with that reporter, if such a thing was within the limits of possibility. He chuckled as he remembered he was on friendly terms with the managing editor of the paper that printed the "exclusive," and then he straightway betook himself to the office.

"That article," laughed the managing editor, after cordially greeting the detective. "Oh, yes; we expected that would create a sensation. I have been looking for you, as I knew you were on the case. Who wrote it? Um-ha! Well, now, did you really think I would answer that question?"

"I sincerely hoped so," answered Dan, seriously.

"You are looking for a pointer?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, Downing, you are the only man who could get a word out of me. As it is, I don't know as I can help you out. I will tell you who wrote the article, but you may not find him inclined to talk."

"Well, that will not be your fault."

"Surely not."

Then the editor turned to a boy and said:

"Tell Johnston he's wanted."

A few minutes later, Dan was conversing with the reporter, a smooth-faced and boyish-appearing young man with a shrewd light in his eyes.

"Of course I had something to make the story from," was the reporter's reply to Dan's question. "No matter what may be said, it is not all a fake."

Dan smiled.

"Then you confess it is in a measure a fake?"

"Not at all; I am not in the confessing line."

The reporter was cautious.

"You fear trouble?"

"Not I!"

"Then why are you so cautious?"

"I have my reasons. As for any trouble that may arise, the chief told me he would shoulder it. I am a little surprised that he should acknowledge I was the author of that article."

"It is because I am a particular friend of his,

and he knows I am trying to get at the exact truth of this affair. He knew I would not use my knowledge against you, for he and I have had dealings before. I am not connected with the regulars, but am a sort of freelance. No, don't call me a private. The average private is a reprehensible creature, I know. I have a name for myself. It is the 'Go-it-Alone Detective.' Sometimes I am called the 'Always-on-Deck Detective,' as I have a way of coming out right side up, no matter what kind of a scrape I may get into.

"Now, I am not here to awe you into telling me a word, and I promise you whatever you do tell will not be used against you. Instead of that, I am inclined to help you out."

Johnston smiled incredulously.

"Help me out?—out of what?"

"Why, out with the truth in the case. I'm an old hand in detective work, and know exactly how to work up even a shadow-clue. Give me a starter, and I have a way of following a covered trail to the end; so my proposal is that you give me any points you may have picked up and, in return, if they lead to anything, I give you the glory of a scoop. Catch?"

"I catch, but I don't bite. If I get the glory of a scoop, you get the glory of working out the case."

Dan drew off.

"Are you one of those reporter-detective cranks?"

"I would be if I was permitted."

"What do you mean?"

"That I have a good starter, but the chief will not give me time to work it up. He thinks I am off."

"You mean he has no confidence in your starter?"

"Exactly."

"Then here is your chance to show him his mistake."

"How?"

"With my aid. If there is anything in your starter, I will make the most out of it. You have not the time to do that. By refusing to tell me what you know, you may be retarding justice. I will give you my word of honor that you shall have the true story ahead of all others when the end is reached."

Johnston hesitated, and Dan saw he had touched the right chord at last. For all of its shyness, he was about to land the fish.

"Surely this is fair," Dan added. "If the chief had not trusted me, he would not have told me who wrote the story. Now is your chance to show him he has not sized you up correctly, which may mean promotion for you."

Ah! that was what struck the mark dead center!

"Say!" and Johnston faced Dan squarely. "There may not be a thing in this clew of mine."

"Of course not."

"I will tell you to start with that it is mighty slim."

"I expected that."

"I want to speak with the chief. If he says all right, you shall have it."

Dan began to feel confident, and readily acquiesced. The reporter spent a few moments in quiet conversation with the managing editor, and then he came back to where Dan was waiting.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you all I know. It will be a good thing if there is anything in it, and you stick to your agreement."

"I always keep my word," assured Dan.

"Well, it was like this: We were hard up for a striker, so I went slumming for a story. I happened to strike down on South street below the Bridge. I fancied I might hit some old sailor who had a good yarn. I took in the saloons, and in one of them I found an old tar who was so jolly full that he had hard work to keep on his pins. That's why the chief doesn't have any faith in my pointer."

"What is?"

"Because this man was intoxicated when he told the things from which I worked up the yarn."

"If he had no faith in it, why did he print it?"

"He said it was good for a sensation."

"And that is all the average New York newspaper cares for. Give them a sensation, and to blazes with the facts! Go on."

"Well, this old tar had been in some kind of a row."

Dan started.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

"His head was tied up and he complained that it pained him. Once he said it had kept him flat on his back for two days."

To look at the detective's face one would never dream what a sudden commotion the reporter's words had created in his breast. Mentally, he had exclaimed:

"Jack Backstay, or I'm a fool!"

Aloud, he quietly said:

"Go ahead."

"Well, this old fellow was telling some kind of a rambling yarn to a companion. I happened to catch Colonel Wayne's name, so I listened. I could not understand all the old fellow was saying, but I understood enough to get the drift of

his talk. It was about Wayne's relation with some Spanish girl. I did not get the points of how it came about. The old fellow could not keep track of his own yarn. However, he is the same as said he knew Wayne was killed by a Cuban lover of the Spanish girl."

"Are you sure that was what he meant?"

"Not sure; but it was what he seemed to mean."

"Did you attempt to question him?"

"Yes."

"With what result?"

"No result. There was a row in the saloon, and in the melee I lost my man. I searched everywhere for him, but he was gone."

"And this is the whole foundation of your story?"

"It is."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LOVERS.

THE engagement of Rodney Wayne and Iva Delmar had been announced some months before the mysterious death of the young man's father.

At the time of Colonel Wayne's death the wedding-day had been decided on, but it became necessary to postpone the ceremony.

Iva was a most beautiful girl, and the flattery and praise of her many sincere admirers in society had not turned her head. She was as sensible as pretty, which is a very rare thing among society belles.

Iva had a brother whose name was Rupert. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, athletic young man, and Rodney Wayne was his chosen comrade. It was through the friendship of the two young men that the love affair between Rodney and Iva came about.

Of course, Rupert was on hand with his sympathy, which was expressed after a fashion that left no doubt of its sincerity, and really made Rodney feel glad his brother-in-law-to-be was his boon comrade of the present.

And the tender little message sent by Iva was like sweet balm to his sorrowing heart.

"She is the fairest and dearest girl in all the wide world!" was what Rodney told himself again and again.

Was there ever lover who did not think the same of the one who held the place above all others in his heart?

It was well for Rodney's peace of mind that he could not foresee what was soon to take place.

After the funeral, he called one evening to see Iva. She greeted him in a manner that told him her heart was full of sorrow because of his affliction.

Of course, there could be but one thing as a topic of conversation for a time, but at length Rodney spoke of the mystery that still shrouded the whole affair.

"Of course, you saw that wretched story in the *Morning Light*?" he said. "There was not a word of truth in it."

"How dare they print such things!" cried Iva.

"Oh, the newspapers dare anything, nowadays. But, if it is possible, I mean to make the *Light* retract."

"Will it do so?"

"If forced—not otherwise. But, the other papers will be only too glad to roast it."

"Roast it? Why, what is that?"

"When they are convinced that there was no truth in the story, they will ridicule the *Light*. Of course, that is not the best way of having the falsehood denied, but the paper that published it may refuse to swallow their own statement. I can prosecute for libel, but I dislike to do so. I do not wish for the notoriety such a move would surely bring."

Iva looked her sympathy. Rodney fancied her more charming than usual this evening, and he moved nearer.

"It is fate that keeps us apart for a little longer, my darling," he softly said, unconsciously turning the course of their conversation.

Her eyes drooped and the soft color mounted to her cheeks. He wondered where in the great world there was another woman half so beautiful.

Iva's eyes were blue and her hair like strands of gold. Her complexion was simply perfect, while her teeth were like pearls. There was something about her that held her lover at a little distance and kept him in awe. Although in perfect health, she seemed fragile, and he sometimes actually feared his gentle touch would hurt her.

In those blue eyes lay all the innocence of a child, and not one whit of that innocence was assumed. Iva had been reared most tenderly, and she really knew very little of the sin, sorrow and suffering in the great world around her. It had been the policy of her parents to keep from her knowledge anything that would shock her sensitive nature. This is far from being the best course to pursue with a child, but it had been the one they saw fit to choose, and Iva was what her short life had made her.

The shock of Colonel Wayne's murder had been severe, but there were more bitter things in store for her, even though her path through life seemed to lie rosy before her eager feet.

Rodney knew he was securing a prize in the trusting girl, but he also knew it was a prize so delicate that it would need constant care lest it be crushed.

"Our happiness is only put a little further off," added Rodney, softly.

"But for your misfortune, my happiness would seem complete," breathed the beautiful girl.

"You are an angel, Iva!" exclaimed the lover, with a sudden burst of uncontrollable enthusiasm. "I wonder how I was ever fortunate enough to win such a prize!"

"Oh, oh!" she playfully exclaimed, tapping his arm with her fan. "An angel! Oh, oh!"

"I mean it!" he insisted.

"Perhaps so."

He gave her a reproachful glance.

"How can you be so cruel, Iva! You know I mean it!"

"You may mean it now but will change your mind by and by."

"Never!"

"Ah, but you will. There are so many beautiful girls in the world."

He secured her hand.

"But not another half so beautiful as you, my darling! You are the queen of them all!"

She was inclined to banter, and she would not take him seriously.

"Flatterer!" she retorted. "How many others have you told the same?"

"Never before have I spoken those words in earnest."

"Oh, but that is as good as a confession of having spoken them!"

"Don't take it that way, Iva! You are tantalizing! I cannot quite understand you tonight."

"So much the better. I do not wish you to understand me too easily. A problem solved loses its interest."

"What a wise saying!"

"Oh, now that sounds like sarcasm! If there is anything I dislike it is sarcasm."

He drew back a little and she freed her hand.

"No, no!" he quickly cried, securing the soft fingers once more. "I will not have it so! By Jove! I almost believe you are seeking a tiff!"

"Then you must think me really cruel! This is the last occasion I would choose for a quarrel with you, Rodney. Do you look on me as so utterly heartless?"

"Forgive me! forgive me!" was his repentant supplication. "It is because I do not understand you that it seemed as if you were trying to wound me. You are the most fascinating little conundrum I ever attempted to solve."

"And I trust you will find me a conundrum you will never be able to entirely solve."

And Rodney whispered:

"I trust so myself!"

Five minutes later, Rupert came suddenly into the room. It was a familiar way he had with Rodney, but he paused in consternation at what he saw.

"Oh, say!" he exclaimed, as the lovers suddenly moved further apart. "Don't mind me! I didn't come in! Anyway, I'm not here! I mean that I'm going right out!"

He turned to do so, but Rodney called to him:

"Hold on, my boy; it isn't necessary."

"But I'm interrupting the session."

"The session?"

"Yes—of court."

"No, not at all. Court has adjourned."

"Well, possibly I had better go out till Iva gets over blushing."

"Rupert!" cried the girl, protestingly.

"I suppose that's my proper name," he retorted.

"Indeed, you are wrong. It's your given name," laughed the girl, concealing her flushed face behind her fan. "How warm it is!"

And then all three laughed a little and suddenly looked sober.

"I will come in again," said Rupert, as he turned away; but Rodney was quickly at his side, catching him by the arm.

"You are not going, old fellow. I have some things I wish to say to you."

So Rupert was forced into a seat and a "three-cornered" conversation began.

Half an hour later Rodney was bidding Iva good-by. Rupert had agreed to accompany his friend down-town, but had slipped away on some pretext, thus giving the young people a chance to part as lovers should.

Rodney ventured to hold Iva close for a little, and place a tender kiss on her red lips.

"It will not be so very long, my darling," he softly breathed. "We must wait for a little, and then—"

Something like a shadow fell on her beautiful face, and a vague foreboding filled her heart.

"And then we may be parted forever!" she almost sobbed. "Oh, Rodney! I fear something will come between us!"

"By Heaven, no! What can come between us?"

"You may see another for whom you will care more than for me!"

"Such a thought is folly, Iva! I swear to be true to you! No power of earth shall divide us!"

He was in sober earnest; he no more meant to

break that oath than he meant to take his own life. But he had not fathomed all the powers of earth.

Soon Rupert came lightly down the stairs, and the two young men left the house together. It was their fancy to stroll down Broadway, viewing such sights as were to be seen at that time in the evening.

They were not far from Madison Square when a fire-patrol wagon dashed across Sixth avenue. Many people were hurrying in that direction.

Rupert caught a running boy by the shoulder.

"Where is the fire, my lad?"

"Dunno. Over this way somewhere. They say there was an explosion. It's goin' to be a ripper!"

Then the boy fled on again.

"Let's take a look at the fire," said Rupert.

"I'm with you," assured Rodney; and he little dreamed of the snare into which that lurid blaze would lead him.

CHAPTER XII.

RODNEY TO THE RESCUE.

THE fire proved to be on Sixth avenue, and it was caused by an explosion in a store where chemicals were kept.

The explosion had caused the flames to spread so rapidly that the witnesses seemed demoralized.

Even the police seemed in an unusual state of agitation, and they struggled ineffectually to keep back the multitude of people who came swarming to the spot like so many bees.

The fire patrol reached the spot only a moment before Rodney and Rupert.

Then from around a corner came a clanging and smoking fire-engine.

Over the store were tenements, the occupants of which had not all been able to escape. Many were at the windows, crying for help, when the two young men came upon the scene.

"My God!" exclaimed Rupert. "They are cut off from the street! They will be roasted, if the firemen do not get their ladders up lively!"

At one of the windows was a woman who seemed crazed by the danger. She was wildly trying to fling herself to the street below, while a man was holding her back.

"Keep back! keep back!" screamed a hundred voices from the street.

Others were shouting:

"There are fire-escapes at the back! Make for the fire-escapes!"

But many of the women were so dazed by their danger that they had forgotten the fire-escapes, and the cries of the people below came up in one hoarse roar that only served to confuse them still more.

"Some of those people will not escape!" exclaimed Rodney.

As he spoke, at one of the upper windows appeared a beautiful girl, who screamed for help.

"Look there!" cried Rupert. "Did you hear what she said?"

"I did!" answered Rodney, excitedly. "It was something about being locked in that room!"

"Yes, she said she was locked in there!"

"And it is directly over the most dangerous spot! The fire is spreading with amazing rapidity! She is really in danger!"

"That is true! All the people but her seem to be out of that part."

"Great heavens! How slow the firemen are! Rupert, I am going to try to save that girl!"

"You can't do it."

"I can!"

"How?"

"I'll find a way!"

Rodney was a muscular young man, and he literally fought his way through the crowd. Rupert started to follow, and would have done so had he not been tripped up. In a moment he lost sight of his friend.

Rodney kept straight on, dashing into a doorway of the same block in which the fire was raging. Up the stairs he plunged, hurrying past the people who were carrying their valuables to a place of safety.

The young man kept straight on till he reached the top floor. There he found some steps and quickly placed them so he could reach the scuttle-window. This stuck fast, but he dashed it open and was soon on the roof.

He had not noticed whether Rupert had followed or not. His one thought was to reach the beautiful girl whose life was in danger.

There were others on the roof, but they were hurrying to a place where they could escape to the street below. Rodney was hurrying in exactly the opposite direction.

Swiftly reaching the front edge of the roof, he looked over and located the window from which the girl had made her appeal.

The firemen were running up their ladders, but they were some distance to the right, the fierceness of the fire at that particular spot kept them at a distance.

Rodney was astonished when he saw how rapidly the flames had risen. It seemed as if the building was a timber box, and he saw any one directly beneath was in great peril.

Then the girl appeared at the window again,

and the would-be-rescuer was directly above her.

"Remain where you are!" he shouted down to her. "I will find you!"

Wheeling, he dashed back to the sky-light which he knew communicated with that part.

It was fastened!

Lifting his foot, he dashed it through the glass, carrying away the sash.

In another moment he dropped through the opening thus made, not even pausing to see where he would land.

Like a cat, he struck on his feet below, but he was in darkness. A thick volume of smoke rolled up from below and choked him. The sullen roar of the fiery monster came to his ears.

"My God!" he groaned. "How shall I find her in this darkness?"

He moved forward, his hands outstretched.

"Where are you?" he called. "Answer!"

But there was no reply.

It was a blind search, but he was determined to find her. Again and again he called.

The smoke grew denser and he saw a faint red glow ahead. He found himself near some stairs, and below was the glare of the fire.

"I fear I shall not find her!" he groaned.

"Even if I should, this might prove a death-trap for both!"

The smoke was so dense he was forced to lay with his face close to the floor. In this manner he recovered sufficiently to shout again.

There came a reply!

Near at hand some one beat on a door and shouted back.

It was a female's voice!

"I believe I have found her!" he thought.

In another moment he was at the door. With all his strength, he hurled himself against it.

It shivered and shook, but withstood the shock.

Retreating several steps, he once more plunged forward through the smoke, the light of the approaching flames now revealing the door.

With a crash, the door went down before his assault, and he staggered into a room where a gas-jet was burning.

Before him was the beautiful girl he sought.

"Save me!" she cried, holding out her hands to him.

"I will!" was his response. "But not a moment is to be lost! The fire is close at hand!"

He saw she was in a half-fainting condition, and he caught her in his strong arms. A breath of fresh air from the open window gave him new life and courage, but a glance from the window showed him the ladders still far away.

The first water was being flung on the flames, and a surging sea of human faces filled the street below.

A great cry went up when Rodney appeared at the window with the girl half-flung over his shoulder.

"The roof! the roof!" howled the spectators.

"The roof it must be!" thought the young man. "This particular part of the building seems doomed."

But as he turned back from the window, he was appalled by the red glare of the fire.

It seemed as if the flames had reached the very door of the room!

A savage word burst from Rodney's lips as he sprang forward. He clung fast to his precious burden and plunged once more into the mass of smoke.

The fire had not reached the door, but it was leaping up the stairs, crackling with devilish glee. It seemed that the fire fiend was sure of at least two victims.

Rodney hurried back to the sky-light. The glare of the fire now enabled him to look around.

He wondered at the change that had so rapidly taken place, for only a few moments before he had stood in utter darkness at that very spot.

He looked for the steps that would enable him to carry the fair girl to the roof.

He saw nothing of them!

"Great heavens!" he gasped. "Are there no steps here?"

Then the smoke rolled in more thickly than before, and he was obliged to search for them with his free hand.

He did not find them!

The smoke was overcoming him. He felt his strength departing, and he gasped painfully for breath. It seemed that a thousand keen blades were tearing his lungs.

Was he to die thus?

No!

"The fire-escape!"

With a last desperate spurt of strength, he dashed through some rooms where the smoke was so thick he could only rush forward blindly and trust to luck.

Fortune favored him.

He reached a window at the back of the house, falling half-fainting on the sill, but still clinging to the unconscious girl.

The breath of cool air revived them both, and they started up just as the flames burst out beneath them.

The fire-escape was there, but the iron ladder was licked by flames!

They were cut off in all directions!

Escape seemed impossible!

"My God!" cried Rodney, as the beautiful

girl unclosed her great dark eyes and looked into his face. "I have failed in the attempt to save you! The fire has cut us off, and we cannot reach the roof!"

A strange look passed over the girl's face—a look revealed by the light of the flames. He was still holding to her, and her arm fell around his neck.

"Death will not be so very hard now!" she declared, with strange composure.

"What do you mean?"

"At last in this world I have found a king among men!"

Her voice was soft and musical as the ringing of a mellow bell. Her cheeks that had been so white with fear were now flushed with the hot blood of youth. Her lips were red as ripe cherries.

The girl was a brunette, but her complexion was clear and pure. And her eyes—her glorious dark eyes! They fascinated the young man who had risked his own life to save her. He thought never before had he seen so peerless a creature.

Iva!

She was forgotten then!

How the words of this beautiful girl thrilled the blood of Rodney Wayne! He felt his heart give a great leap. He held her in his arms, and he felt that her form, as well as her face, was perfect.

"I have done my best to save you!" he said.

"You have! You are bold, noble and chivalrous! Not one man in a thousand would have done what you have! Is there no way you can escape alone? Leave me! leave me and save yourself!"

"Never!"

"Go, go! It is your only chance! We cannot both escape, but you may get out alone! If you remain, both will perish!"

"I shall remain!"

"You must not! Let me die! Better one life than two!"

"If you die, I die with you!"

"You do not—cannot know what you are saying!"

"I do know, my beautiful one!"

"You are mad!"

"Then I wish never again to be sane!"

She looked deep into his eyes, and her face was transformed. Around his neck she wound both her plump, soft arms, and, half-fainting, she whispered joyously:

"My king! I love you! I love you!"

Forgetting all the world—forgetting the golden-haired girl to whom he had sworn constant faithfulness—forgetting the terrible danger that menaced them, he strained her to his heart, hoarsely whispering:

"My peerless one—my beautiful! Can heaven have a greater joy than this?"

He kissed her again and again. Heart to heart, lip to lip, they were utterly oblivious to the dread horror of death so swiftly closing in upon them!

CHAPTER XIII.

CLOSE TO DEATH.

THERE are moments when the most horrible death loses its power to terrify its chosen victims.

Neither Rodney nor his beautiful companion were conscious of fear now. The young man's heart was filled with a wild joy such as he had never before experienced.

The flames revealed them to people below, and many words which they did not hear were shouted to them.

At length the growing heat made them conscious of the approaching destroyer that threatened to annihilate them.

"See!" murmured the girl. "The fire is very near! We have but a few minutes more! Is it not grand?"

Rodney shuddered a bit.

"Grand but terrible!"

"Do you fear it?" she swiftly asked.

"No, I do not fear it; but you—"

"I am happy, even though death is so near, for I have you here, and you are dearer than life to me! But for this fire I might never have known you for the noble man you are; our souls might have remained forever sundered. The fire brought us together. Even in death it shall not separate us!"

She clung to him, and again he held her close.

"Not even in death!" came hoarsely from his lips. "We will die together, and, if there is another life—"

"Another life?"

"Yes. You believe in that?"

"Oh, I do not know! This life is enough! Another? No, no! I pray not!"

He was astounded; he started back and gazed into her dark eyes, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his ears.

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, don't ask me!" she cried, crushing her face down on his shoulder, so his eyes could not look into hers.

He felt a shudder run over her, as if she really feared the possibility of another life!

And she was standing on the threshold of death!

Nearer and nearer came the flames. All be-

neath them now seemed a vast sea of fire. Smoke was beginning to strangle them, and Rodney saw they could not cling there in the window many moments longer.

"Look up!" he entreated. "Do not hide your face, my peerless one! The time draws near! Let me look into your eyes once again before the flaming demon drags us down!"

She drew back suddenly, but still clung to him.

"Look!" she cried. "Look deep in my eyes, if you will! Tell me what you see!"

"I see the bliss of heaven!" he declared.

"You see nothing repulsive—nothing haggard and hideous—nothing that makes you turn from me in horror?"

"No, no! I see only the eyes of a saint and the face of an angel!"

She gave a great cry of gladness and kissed him.

Oh, how near the fire was! Could it be they must die in a few seconds more? Could it be they must die now when they had just found each other? Could fate be so deadly cruel?

"I do not know your name," said Rodney.

"Won't you tell me your name, my queen?"

She hesitated.

"What matters it now?" she asked. "In a few moments more, names will be nothing to us."

"But I would know your true name. Tell me—tell me?"

"You may call me Luona, if you wish to speak it."

"Luona! It is a beautiful name!"

"Tell me yours."

"It is Rodney Wayne."

She heard him, and from her lips broke a cry of deep fear and anguish—a cry like that of one struck to the heart with a keen blade.

Then he again held her senseless form in his arms!

She had swooned!

Madly he tried to arouse her. He rained kisses on her face and lips—he wildly called to her.

"Luona—oh, Luona, my life! Awake! Can't you hear me? Unclose those glorious eyes! Look into mine once more! Luona!"

But she did not stir; she lay like one from whom the breath of life has just departed.

The sullen roar of the fire seemed to mock him. It leaped and danced before his eyes, flaunting a mantle of smoke into his face. He fancied he saw legions of demons in the flames. They laughed at and mocked him—they stretched their skinny hands toward him and beckoned.

"Back, you devils!" he cried. "You shall not have her! She is mine—mine!" He strained the unconscious girl to his breast, fancying they were trying to rob him of her.

In the midst of the demon faces he saw one more hideous than all the others. It was that of an old hag with yellow teeth and shriveled skin. Her dirty white hair hung over her face, but through the veil her eyes gleamed like gleaming balls. She gnashed her teeth and laughed with Satanic glee, while she kept nodding toward him.

"I am going mad!" he groaned, realizing for a moment that what he seemed to behold was but the imagining of his brain. "The fire is near! In a minute more it will be upon us!"

The red flames were on every hand. Away down below the people on the ground were still shouting to him, but their voices mingled in a general roar.

Standing face to face with death, a man thinks of many things in a minute. Rodney's mind swiftly went back over his past life—away back to the time he knelt at his mother's knee. That dear mother had been dead many years. Then, with a swiftess that was marvelous his thoughts ran over his life-journey down to that moment.

In reviewing the past, he thought of Iva.

A feeling of horror suddenly came over him. Then he remembered how a short time before he had held that beautiful golden head on his shoulder, and swore no power on earth could separate them.

Now he was false to her! There was another head upon his shoulder, and he held another in his arms.

"Thank God, Iva will never know!" were the words which came chokingly from his lips. "Perhaps it is all for the best. If we were to escape, I could not give this one up, and I fear that would break Iva's heart. She will never dream I was false to her, and she will think of me as one who died in trying to save another of her sex. Poor little Iva!"

He sobbed as a strong man sometimes will, but he still held the beautiful Luona close to his breast.

"Heavens! what a divine creature she is!" he murmured, as he looked down into her face, as revealed by the red glare of the fitful flames. "It is a terrible thing for the fire to mar those features!"

A sudden thought came to him, and he started up, crying:

"It is a better death than by fire; I will do it! A swift rush through the air, followed by a shock—then all is over. That is not such a very hard way to die. Perhaps her beautiful face will remain unmarred. I will do it!"

Up on the window-sill he climbed, Luona still held in his arms. He paused a single instant to

kiss her again. The fire and the smoke shut him out from the view of those below.

"Now good-by to life!" he cried.

And then something swung down from above and struck him in the face.

It was a stout rope.

"Hey there!" cried a voice from the roof. "Lively, old man! No time for single work! We're enough for you both! Make fast and we will have you up here directly!"

He knew the voice.

It was Rupert!—brave Rupert—loyal Rupert! A thrill of joy and hope ran over him. They might be saved after all!

Truly there was no time to waste. He knew that well enough. He caught the end of the rope and wound it around his arm many times. He could not release Luona so he might tie a knot. He still held her close with his right arm.

"Are you ready, up there?" he shouted.

"All ready," was the prompt response.

"Then pull!"

With that command on his lips, he swung out over the red flames, which seemed to leap higher in savage eagerness, as if understanding their coveted victims were on the verge of escaping.

CHAPTER XIV.

LUONA DISAPPEARS.

THE heat that now rolled up about them was terrible. It seemed to scorch and blister the flesh and sear the eyeballs. Rodney found it impossible to breathe, so he simply clung to the rope with one hand and held fast to his precious burden with the other.

Slowly, little by little, they were drawn upward. It almost seemed as if the fire rose faster than they. To Rodney it felt as if his arm was being torn from its shoulder socket. He held his breath as long as he could, and the hot air which he took into his lungs seemed to burn them. And then the smoke closed all about them.

Once Rodney felt his fingers slip—felt the rope slide around his arm! With a last outlay of strength, he held fast to it.

The edge of the roof was reached, and then strong hands came over and grasped Rodney and his unconscious burden.

A cheer went up from the spectators below as they saw the two figures lifted to the roof.

The moment the strain was taken from his arm, Rodney fainted.

When consciousness returned, the young man was reclining on a couch in a hotel that happened to be near the fire, and a physician was attending him.

He looked around, and the first word his lips uttered was:

"Luona!"

Rupert came promptly to his friend's side.

"You are all right, old man," he cheerfully declared. "All the same, it was a wonderfully tight squeeze. We barely got off the roof in time."

Rodney stared blankly at his friend, his senses being in something of a muddle.

"The roof?" he repeated. "Why, we were at the window. The fire was right upon us! I held her close, so it would not mar her beautiful face, and I was about to jump. Didn't I jump?"

"Oh, no! We got a rope down to you, and pulled you both up."

"Then where—where is she?"

"The girl?"

"Yes—Luona."

"I believe they took her away somewhere. They wanted to take you off in an ambulance, but I wouldn't hear to it. I had you brought here. How is he, doctor?"

"I'm all right," declared Rodney, and he attempted to sit up.

But he was not all right, by any means. A sudden pain seemed to pierce his heart, and his head reeled; he gasped for breath and fell back helplessly.

"You had better keep still for a time, young man," warned the physician, almost sternly. "You will be all right if you give your system time to recover. Here, swallow this."

A glass of something was held to Rodney's lips, and he mutely obeyed the doctor's command. He felt better immediately.

"You did a wonderfully brave thing in saving that girl," asserted Rupert, taking a seat at his friend's side. "I tried to follow you when you rushed into the building, but we were separated in the crowd. Fortunately, some of the firemen found you at the window, and a rope was brought. I was on the roof with them, and we pulled you up."

"Was she hurt?"

"Not a bit."

"I am glad of that! Poor little Luona!"

Rupert knit his brows.

"You seem to know her," he said, somewhat stiffly.

"She told me her name."

"Did you ever see her before?"

"Never before I saw her at the window."

Something like a look of relief passed over the face of Rodney Wayne's friend.

"Well, she is probably all right. She was unconscious when the roof was reached, but I believe she recovered shortly after."

"Do you know where they took her?"

"No. I was paying strict attention to you about that time. I am sure she has fallen into the hands of friends. You seem highly interested in her."

Rodney stirred uneasily and his eyes avoided the searching gaze of his friend.

"I am," he confessed. "It is natural, under the circumstances."

Then the potion he had swallowed began to make him drowsy, and he soon fell asleep.

"He will be all right when he awakes," assured the physician, as he departed.

The following day Rodney Wayne began searching for Luona. The girl had mysteriously disappeared, and he found it impossible to learn much of anything about her. In the excitement, she had scarcely been noticed.

But the rescue of Rodney and the fair unknown had been witnessed by several newspaper reporters, and the young man had been pestered to tell his story. In order to get rid of the reporters as quickly as possible, he gave them a brief account of the deadly peril through which he had passed.

Every one of the morning papers made a sensational story of it, and the "display" headlines placed Rodney's name conspicuously before the public. He was referred to as the son of the "late" Colonel Wayne, whose murder was still shrouded in mystery.

But what irritated Rodney more than anything else was the insinuation of some of the papers that there was some kind of a romance between him and the fair Luona. One paper said the young man was seen to kiss the girl passionately as they clung in the window with the red flames all about them.

Then came the afternoon papers with a story that thoroughly aroused Rodney.

It was to the effect that he was really in love with the beautiful unknown and had promised to marry her, even though his engagement to Iva Delmar had been announced some time before.

"Great Heaven!" he cried, as the paper was torn in shreds by his nervous hands. "What lies these sheets will tell! And what makes it so bad is that their stories generally have a single grain of truth about them. They have lied about my father, and now they take to lying about me! How much of this must I endure?"

Still he kept up his search for Luona. Her disappearance nearly drove him frantic.

"She may be dead or dying!" he thought.

"She was not taken to the hospital, and I can find no trace of her. Am I to lose her just now that I have found her? Am I never to look on that glorious face again?—never to hold her in my arms?"

"Perhaps it were better that I never did," was his mental confession. "She is the sweetest siren I ever met! I am sure there is no such a thing as resisting her! In that short space of time while we were standing on the brink of death, I learned to love her more passionately than I ever loved human being before. She completely carried me away."

"What of Iva? This newspaper lie will strike at her heart. I must see her and deny it. See her! No, no, no! I dare not see her now! I am so agitated—so broken up! She would read the truth in my face. I cannot face her now, so I will write."

He did so, telling her the newspaper story was all a vile lie. But, there was something strange—something cold and distant—about the letter. It sent a chill to Iva's heart, and, although it was meant to cheer and reassure her, it caused her to shed bitter tears.

Rupert also felt as if something was going wrong, but he kept his own counsel and waited.

"If Rodney Wayne is trying anything crooked with my sister, I will make him sorry!" said the young athlete, to himself. And then he added:

"Pshaw! He would not think of such a thing! Rodney is the soul of honor, and I wrong him! His father's death has changed him, but he is still a man!"

Dan Downing also perceived the change in Rodney. He was a little puzzled, for he could not understand what had come over the young man. Rodney seemed really to have lost interest in a measure in the detection of the murderer of his father. It was not true that he did not wish the murderer brought to justice, but he was so troubled over the disappearance of the beautiful Luona that he scarcely thought of anything else.

The following night after the fire, Rodney was troubled with dreams of the fair girl and of the demon faces he had fancied he saw in the flames. Of those hideous faces, one seemed to haunt him more than all others, and that one was the face half hidden by the flames of tangled white hair that fell over it.

The more Rodney dreamed of that face the more convinced he became—even in his dream—that there was something familiar about it. It seemed as if he had seen those fiery eyes before.

Where? When?

The answer to those questions did not come to him immediately.

In the morning he arose from his bed, feeling as weary as when he lay down, but still determined to find Luona.

So another day was spent in searching.

But Luona was not found.

The eagerness of the search for the lost one now completely absorbed Rodney. He could think of nothing else, and he knew no rest till he was completely exhausted and discouraged.

"I have lost her!" he groaned. "I feel I shall never see her again! The excitement of our perilous position made her betray herself to me, and she has since repented. She then declared she loved me, even though she had only seen me a few minutes before. She remembers that now and it seems unmaidenly to her, so her shame causes her to keep in hiding. This must be the true explanation of her disappearance."

Believing this, Rodney caused a personal to be inserted in the *Herald*, in which he begged her to write him a line—to let him know if she had come through her terrible experience unharmed. This notice was couched in terms that might seem mysterious to anybody but the one for whose particular eyes it was intended. He believed she could not fail to understand it.

Rodney gave an address to which a reply should be sent, and he was overjoyed when, the following day he received a dainty note, written in an unfamiliar but graceful feminine hand.

But when he read the note, all his joy was shattered and his hopes seemed crushed. It ran as follows:

"RODNEY, MY SAVIOR:—I am well—I still live, and I owe my life to the noblest and bravest of men. To me, Rodney, you are a god! But I must never see you again. You are so far above me we can never be anything to each other. What must you think of me! My cheeks burn with shame when I think of the words I spoke as you held me in your arms with the fire rising around us. But I then imagined there was no escape for us, and so I let you look into my heart. Now that you know so much, even though we are separated forever, I will say life has been worth the living to experience a few moments of such rapturous joy as overcame me then! Death alone can rob me of that sweet memory!"

"Good-by, Rodney! God bless you! The black past stands between us and holds us apart with its skeleton hands. Without you, the future looks drear and dark! But what is to be must be. I will be useless to search further for me. If in truth you really care for me, give over the attempt to find me. All I ask is that you think of me sometimes—think of me tenderly."

"Adios, Rodney! Adios, salvador mio!"

"LUONA."

CHAPTER XV.

SCRIMPY SPOTS OLD SAL.

DOUBLE-VOICE DAN sat in his office, and there was a troubled look on his face. He was thinking deeply, and his thoughts were of the perplexing mystery which he had undertaken to unravel—the Wayne case.

Just now he was thinking of Rodney, whom he had seen a short time before.

"The fellow acted very strange!" muttered the detective. "He seemed to have suddenly lost interest in the murder of his father, though only a short time has elapsed since that occurred. I do not understand it all. It is not natural. By Jove! it almost makes me suspicious of the young man!"

As he uttered those words, Dan leaped to his feet and began pacing the little room, his hands clasped behind his back. His thoughts had taken a new turn, but after some moments, he shook his head.

"No, no!" he said. "It is so devilishly unnatural! I am foolish to think it possible Rodney Wayne killed his own father! He is too open and frank; I see no demon in his eyes. Of course he did not do the deed."

"But, who did? Was it either Bark Murphy or Hack Gibson? Perhaps so. If they did the crime, then I must find how this serpent dagger came in the possession of either of them. In order to do that, I ought to find Inez Cordova."

"As for the Spanish woman, Roving Jack may not have been mistaken. Inez may still live. If so, she is the hag known as Old Sal. Then Old Sal must be found. I have done my level best, but I am hampered for the want of men I can trust."

"It is time for Scrims to report. That is what I am waiting for. If it were not for that, I should be trying to get on track of Old Sal. Something is keeping the boy away to-night. If he does not show up within thirty minutes, I shall lock the office and let him keep his report over till to-morrow."

But the gamin detective showed up. He soon came rushing in, plainly excited.

"I've seen her!" he shouted, flinging his hat into the air. He was again dressed in his old ragged garments of the street—"seen Old Sal! I'm onto it now, an' Byrnes ain't nowhere!" and the street Arab thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and strutted about the office, while Double-voiced Dan was forced to laugh at his comical air of importance.

"Tell me all about it, Scrims," was the detective's request. "If you have struck Old Sal's trail, you are showing up well as my assistant. So let me hear your report."

"Well, yer see, it was dis way," explained the

gamin, pausing and placing the index finger of his right hand on the palm of his left, his body bent forward. "I says ter myself, says I: 'Mr. Stubbs, youse don't amount ter anyting at dis detective racket, so youse'd best go jump off der dock.'"

"Go ahead."

"Well, I felt mighty blue, I'm tellin'! Why, I actually sot down on de curb an' paid a kid five cents to kick me on der back of der neck! Der chump come darn nigh breakin' my spiral collum where it hinges onter my neck-bone. He didn't quite kill me, but come so nigh it I was mad 'cause he didn't. I fell over in der gutter an' lay dere till a big cop come up an' punched me wid his stick. Den I got up."

"Well?" said Dan, somewhat impatiently.

"Not very well, thankee," was the prompt retort. "I was feelin' all broke up. Jest der same, dat kick in der neck give me an idee—made me think of Beazley Nuggins, der Slasher."

"Really! the one who was forever cutting drunken men and going through them?"

"Dat's der mug."

"I had him pulled. I was on the regular force then. He cut about a dozen men around the face and neck. It was pure devilishness more than anything else that made him do it. He got a long term, and I have not heard anything from him since he was set free."

"Der old man's out of it; he hain't no good any more. He's only jest livin' along till he dies."

"You spotted him?"

"Sure."

"What for?"

"I was arter Old Sal."

"Well, how could Nuggins help you find her?"

"By meetin' her."

"But what reason had you for thinking he'd meet her?"

"Reckon youse don't know he useter s'port her 'fore he went up?"

"No."

"Well, he did."

"Then I understand why you followed Nuggins. Now tell me what success you had."

"Great! Der old cove took me right ter der gal we want. Didn't hev ter hang round watchin' him a long while, either. Dey met on Beekman."

"Tell me all about it."

"Well, der old bloke met der old gal, an' dey said somethin' dat I didn't ketch. I was wantin' ter hear dat talk, so I ketches up a dirty paper out of der gutter an' hustles up. Says I: 'Please buy dis pape'. It's der last one, an' der old man'll knock me eye out if I don't sell it."

"Den der old gal looked at me like dis," and Scrimpy illustrated, scowling as fiercely as he could. "'Git ter t'under out of dis!' she snarled, showin' dem poorty teet' of hern; an' she made a swipe at me dat'd knocked me stiff if I hadn't dodged like Charley Mitchell wid John L. arter him. Den I jest backed off an' tumbled me nose at her, like dis. 'Go step on dat face, old gal!' said I. 'It gives me a pain.'"

"Arter dat I jest kept hangin' 'round, an' dey didn't pay much 'tention ter me. But, I didn't hear all dey said. Der old mug was tryin' ter git her ter come back ter him, but she forked over some shiners, an' said she'd be blowed if she would. She said she was makin' a bood', but she didn't tell him how she was doin' it. She said she'd see dat he didn't starve."

"Dey mumbled a lot of tings dat I didn't ketch, and den she started off one way an' he another. I follered Old Sal. Now, I reckon dat was right?"

"Dead right, Scrims!" assured Dan. "You're a regular young Vidocq! You'll make a detective!"

"Excuse me blushes! But, jest youse wait till I git all t'rough wid me story. Dat old gal was a keener! You bet she tumbled dat she was bein' follered."

"No?"

"Well, she did. She skipped down Water."

"With you hot after her?"

"Sure. I tried not ter let her know I was pipin' her, but she smoked me."

"You follered just the same?"

"Till she give me der slip."

"What?"

"It's a sollum fac'," confessed Scrimpy, dejectedly. "Dat old crow-bait flung me jest as slick as fallin' off der dock! I never felt wuss in all me life! If I'd been loaded, den I'd touched der fuse an' blowed meself up."

"Slipped you! Too bad! too bad!"

"Shall I give up me commission an' resign from de force?" asked the boy, soberly.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAN VISITS THE SLASHER.

"OH, no!" laughed Dan. "I guess we'll retain you awhile longer."

Scrimpy's spirits seemed suddenly on the decline. He had appeared quite jubilant when he entered the office, but the memory of his failure to follow the old woman was plainly depressing.

"I don't 'low I'm any good," he confessed.

"Well, you are."

"Straight?"

"Yes, straight goods. You have discovered that Old Sal meets Beazley Nuggins."

"Dat's so."

"She will probably meet him again."

"Yep."

"Next time she must be followed to her retreat."

"Dat's der stuff!"

"You know where The Slasher hangs out?"

"Yep. Almost under der Bridge, on Dover."

"What kind of a place?"

"Top loft."

"Been in?"

"No. Took a peek t'rough a crack."

"How's he live?"

"Well, he don't sling on much style. 'Most all he gits goes fer booze. He drinks like a fish."

"Keep drunk?"

"No; der stuff don't seem ter have much 'fect on der old boy."

Dan arose.

"I think I will take a walk."

"Where to?"

"The Slasher's."

"W'at fer?"

"I'm going to try squeezing."

"No good. He won't talk."

"There's nothing like tryin'."

"You mark w'at I tells yer."

"I know he doesn't squeeze easily, for he would not blow a word when he was pulled for the cutting. All the same, I had evidence enough against him to send him up. I'll make him think I'm onto him again."

"All right, boss; you know your business best."

"It won't do any hurt if I fail, for I am going to keep you still on the watch."

"I may make anodder break like dis one."

"Guess not, Scrims. Next time you must do your level best to follow her to the place where she is hanging out. That is, if I fail to squeeze the truth out of The Slasher. Now, boy, go ahead and pilot me to the retreat of Beazley Nuggins."

"Say, boss! Let me make a suggest'."

"All right. What is it?"

"Put on a disguise."

"What for?"

"You's pritty well known ter der gang down dat way, an' some of dem might spot yer."

"What if they did?"

"Dey might have some kind of a trap up in dat old garret."

Dan considered a minute, and then decided to follow the gamin's advice.

"It won't do any harm," he said, as he disappeared into the back room.

There was a vast change in the appearance of the detective when he came out of that room. He looked like a German of comfortable proportions and rather hard luck.

"How you vas, don'd id?" he said, bowing to Scrimpy. "I t'ink berhabs maype dis vill do, hey?"

The boy gazed at him in admiration.

"Say!" he cried, enthusiastically; "you're der jim dandy, an' dat's w'at's der matter!"

"Nix," and Dan shook his head. "Shim Dandy vas nod my name, young veller. Id vas Hans Suzendozzle. I vas Yankeeized so much you mighd nefer sugsbeet id, bud mein fater vas a German. Mein muter vas also haf some German blood in her."

"You don't say!" laughed Scrimpy.

"Yaw. V'at vas dere foony apoud dot?"

"I'd give a t'ousan' dollars if I could play dat game!" declared the street Arab. "Pard, you're out of sight, dat's w'at!"

A few moments later, the boy left the office, and the disguised detective quickly followed him. Scrimpy swung onto a car, and Dan ran after it, shouting.

"Holt on, mein frient—holt on! I pelief dot car I vill take, don'd id! Stob dot car britty soon righd off quig!"

The conductor gave the signal to stop, exclaiming:

"Hurry up here, you lumbering sauerkraut Dutchman."

Puffing as if nearly blown, Dan gained the rear end of the car, and then he transfixed the conductor with his eye.

"Who id vas you calt some Dutchmans, I pelief?" he sternly inquired. "Berhabs you dakes me vor dot? Vell, you mage some mistakes. I vas a vull-plooded Irishmans! Pe a litle bit more carefuller, young veller, or you gid yourself into some troubles. Yaw, dot vas apoud der size uf him!"

Having delivered this advice, he entered the car and sat down so heavily on one side that he nearly tipped it over.

Without appearing to pay any attention to the ragged boy, he left the car at the same time Scrimpy did and followed the gamin ferret down into the low quarter beneath the shadow of the great bridge.

Scrimpy stepped into a doorway, and Dan was at his heels.

"Up dis way," said the street Arab, cautiously, and they ascended the creaking stairs.

Away up at the top of the building, the boy pointed out the door to Beazley Nuggins's room.

"Dere's a crack dere," whispered Scrimpy.

"You kin take a peak t'rough 'fore yer goes'in, if yer wants ter."

Dan softly approached the door and found the crack, through which he peered into the room. At first he could see nothing, but he soon discerned a figure sitting on a chair near a dingy window.

It was The Slasher.

"He was an ugly devil once," thought the disguised detective; "but he must be too old now to be dangerous."

Then he lifted his hand and rapped sharply on the door.

There was no reply, but he heard a stir within.

He rapped again.

"Who's there?" growled an unsteady voice.

"A frient," Dan replied.

"Oh, I know ye!" was the retort. "You're that infernal Dutch baker! S'pose you've come round fer your money? Well, come in!"

The last two words were uttered in a tone that was a cross between a growl and a snarl.

Dan thrust open the door and strode into the room.

"Blame your eyes!" grumbled Beazley Nuggins. "How'd you know I had any money? A man can't git a cent unless you—Hell-o!"

The speaker arose to his feet as swiftly as his aged bones and stiffening joints would allow.

"Who the blazes are you?" he demanded, discovering Dan was not the person he had supposed.

"Oh, come away off!" coolly advised the disguised ferret. "Take a dummies to yourseluf und sid down!"

"What do you want?"

"Maype I dells you dot pritty soon righd away quig. Sed down mid dot elegant bieces uf furnidure v'at you haf vor a chair. Mage yourseluf righd ad home."

This angered Nuggins.

"Git out of here!" he cried. "This is my room, an' I don't 'low any bums in it!"

"Vell, you must stay on der ouside all der dimes den."

The German appeared as cool as could be.

"I'm kinder old," grated Nuggins; "but I reckon there's ernough left in me fer one more good square mill." He then began to roll up his sleeves.

"V'at vas you goin' to do?" inquired Dan.

"Knock ther corners offen you!" declared the old crook.

"Hol hol hol!"

"I'll make ye laff outer t'other corner of yer mouth!"

"Berhabs you don'd know me, maype?"

"I don't want ter."

"I'm der vamous German puggulist, mein frient. I haf knock some packins oudt uf Shon Sulliman. You wants to knock uf me der gorners off. Vell, vell, vell! Dot vas der virst dime I know dere vas some gorners on me!"

The disguised man laughed heartily, as if he had discovered some fine joke.

But Beazley Nuggins's wrath was not appeased. He made for Dan and clinched him. The detective promptly picked the old man up and tossed him on the bed.

The shock was too great for the shaky bedstead to stand, and it went crashing to the floor. Now thoroughly furious, Nuggins struggled up, a knife in his hand!

Dan saw the flash of the blade.

"Holt on!" cried the detective, apparently in great alarm. "Dot hain't some fair show!"

"I'll cut yer gizzard out!" snarled the old prison jackal.

"Keab away off!" commanded Dan, retreating, as if in terror. "I don'd care to be ticklet mid der point uf dot thing, I pelieve! Dot hain't some vair play!"

But, Nuggins made a dash for the detective, striking viciously with the knife.

He felt his wrist caught by fingers of steel that gave it a twist which caused him to cry out with pain and drop the blade. At the same time he was bent backward, and there was a hand at his throat.

"Trying to play your old tricks, are you, Slasher?" were the words spoken in his ear.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DETECTIVE'S TRICK.

THE Slasher was astounded. He showed it in his face, and when he tried to speak, he could only utter some gurgling sounds.

The man who held him fast laughed.

"A regular surprise-party, isn't it!" remarked Double-voice Dan, suggestively. "Don't know exactly what to make of it, do you, Slasher?"

"Who are you?" hoarsely demanded the old crook, trying to break away.

"One who knows you and your past record, perfectly, old cove."

"You hain't no Dutchman!"

"Nary a Dutch, old sent-up. Come now, sit down in that chair there, and we will have a little talk."

Being released from that strong grasp, Beazley Nuggins sunk into the chair, glaring at the man who had so easily proved his master.

"You're the devil!" he said.

"I beg your pardon," was the calm retort. "I am not the devil, but I am close to one of his faithful servants."

"What do you mean by coming in here in this way?"

"Come, come, come! Don't get on your high horse again, Slasher."

"Slasher! Slasher! My name is Nuggins, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"All the same, you are the same old slasher. Oh, I know you—know you well! It is useless to try anything on me, old man."

"You know too much!"

"Too much for your comfort—that's quite right."

The old wretch snarled and muttered, while his fingers worked nervously, but he dared not make another attack on the man who had handled him with so little effort.

"Oh, I know you have swiftly formed a strong affection for me!" bowed Dan. "But I do not care to have you caress me with those hands."

"If I could git 'em on yer throat!"

"You'd take more blood on your soul. You had better be satisfied as it is, for you will surely be assigned to the hottest corner of Satan's domain. You are the man who killed Pug Jones!"

Nuggins half-sprung from his seat.

"It's a lie!" he howled, in terror—"a lie!"

"It's the truth. You are the man who broke Shiny Nell's jaw and shoved her brother off the dock when he accused you."

"No, no, no, no!"

"Oh, yes you are! You plotted the Westfield bank robbery, and it was your hand that struck down the cashier."

"You lie, lie, lie!" almost screamed the old crook, his face now ghastly.

"Oh, you were able to escape punishment for all these things, and you were only brought down at last by your insane desire to cut drunken men in the street. That was why you were called The Slasher. It was a great fall for such as you to come down from planning the robbing of banks to the cutting of drunken men."

Nuggins arose unsteadily to his feet.

"I dunno why you come here with this kind of a mess ter tell," he asserted. "I'm a peaceable old man as is tryin' ter live a quiet life. I never even harmed a 'skeeter, an' now you charge all these things against me! It's hard, hard! But I s'pose I'll have ter endoor it. You've ruined my bed, an' I hain't got no money ter buy another, so I'll have ter lay on ther floor."

"Take some of the money Old Sal forked over and get a decent bed."

"Old Sal! W'at do you know—"

"It ought to be pretty plain to you by this time that I know your record from one end to the other. I am not here to fool with you either. You will discover that."

"Then w'at brings ye here at all?"

"Business—business straight."

The old man was trembling with a combination of excitement and fear, for he knew not what was coming. The visitor had revealed that he knew Beazley Nuggins's history from one end to the other, and that was enough to terrify the crook, who stood in fear of ending his days behind iron bars or meeting death in the fatal chair.

"W'at is your business?" he ventured to ask.

"Now you are getting down to boss sense," declared Dan. "Sit down again. Keep cool. If you do the right thing, you are all right. If not—"

The detective did not finish, but he made a significant gesture that caused a chill to run over the other.

Nuggins sunk down in the chair, still staring at Dan and trying to make out who he was.

"I hain't done northin'," he whined. "A man may make some mistakes, but w'en he strikes fer ther right path, be your critters goin' ter houn' him down?"

"You know as well as I, Nuggins, that when a man has spent the most of his life in deviltry, there is little show for him to walk straight after that."

"They do sometimes."

"For a little, but they usually backslide. As for you, your career is too black for you to ever have much peace. I know you are past your usefulness as a crook, for you are too old and slow; but you showed a few moments ago that the devil was still in you. Why, you would have murdered me, if you had been able!"

"I hev been drinkin' too much—that's it," protested the old felon, rubbing his bony hands together. "I'd never done it if 'tadn't bin fer that—never!"

"That is the excuse of many a man who commits a crime, but it is no excuse at all. Now, Slasher—"

"Don't call me that!"

"You don't like it?"

"No, no, no!"

"Well, I don't blame you. We'll get right down to business now, as we thoroughly understand each other."

"We may understand, but hanged if I believe it! I don't size you, cul."

"Well, you can always reckon that I mean business. Now, where is Old Sal?"

"Hey?"

"You heard my question."

"Who's Old Sal?"

Dan took a step forward, his hand outstretched to grasp Beazley Nuggins's shoulder, but, with a gasp of fear, the old crook shrunk back, gurgling:

"Keep off, cuss ye!—keep off!"

"I'll shake all the meat off those bones if you try to play me!" threatened Double-voice Dan. "I have come here to hear you talk, and you are going to use your mouth, old man, or it will be the worse for you!"

"W'at ye want?"

"I want you to tell me where that old woman is."

"W'at ye want of her?"

"That is none of your business. Where is she?"

"I dunno."

"Here! I have warned you against any of that! Give it to me straight."

"That is straight," protested the frightened old ex-convict. "Honest, that is straight!"

He seemed to be speaking the truth, but Dan knew him so well he was inclined to doubt.

"I see you want to go up for the rest of your days, old man," fell sternly from the detective's lips.

At this Nuggins cringed and cowered.

"Oh, no! oh, no!" he gasped. "I'd rather die! I hain't got much time more ter live, an' I want ter die a free man!"

"Then talk straight."

"It's straight goods, mate, I've been givin' ye!"

"Now, look here," said Dan, "your master, Satan, is listening to all this. He is in that closet there."

The detective pointed to a little door. He had determined to try a trick on Nuggins.

The old crook looked incredulously toward the door.

"W'at be you givin' me?" he demanded, sneeringly. "I hain't no fool."

Dan lifted his hand.

"Listen!"

Nuggins did so, and something like a far-away, sullen muttering came from the closet.

"Hello, Satan!" called Dan.

Then a singular voice, that fairly caused the old crook's hair to stand, replied from the closet:

"Well, what do you want?"

"Are you in there?"

"Yes, I am here."

"What are you there for?"

"I'm waiting for The Slasher!" was the reply.

"My God!" gurgled Nuggins, and he fell back against the wall, his face ghastly.

"How long have you been there?" asked the cunning Double-voiced detective.

"I come here once every twenty-four hours," was answered from the closet, "to see if The Slasher is ready."

"Then his time is nearly up?"

"He has only a little more."

"Then what?"

"Hell!"

Nuggins groaned.

"You see," said Dan, "the old fellow is on the watch for you."

"It's all a trick!" brokenly cried the old man.

"How a trick?"

"There's somebody in the closet—some bloke has crept in here while I was out!"

"Open the door and see."

The crook recoiled.

"No, no, no!" he cried, in terror. "You hev put up a job ter murder me! Some pal of yours is there, ready to cut me w'en I open the door!"

"Well, there is where you fool yourself. I will open the door."

Dan promptly strode forward and threw the door wide open. The closet was bare of everything but an old coat and a hat that hung on a nail.

Beazley Nuggins bent forward and stared in astonishment. Surely there was no one in the closet.

"Well," said Dan, as he closed the door, "you see there is no one there—that is, no one visible to our eyes. All the same, Satan is still waiting there for you."

"It's all bluff!" declared Nuggins, his courage returning.

"Is that what you think? Hello, Satan!"

"What's wanted?" demanded the voice from the closet.

"The Slasher says you are no good."

"He says that? Then he dies this night!"

"I never said it!" howled Nuggins, in renewed terror.

It was with difficulty Dan was able to repress his amusement.

"Hello, Satan!" he called again. "Does Nuggins know where Old Sal is?"

"Of course he does; she's his pal."

The Slasher sprang to his feet.

"I see through ther trick now!" the old crook shouted, triumphantly. "I know you! You're Double-voice Dan!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SCRIMPY SHOWS HIS STUFF.

SOMETHING like an exclamation of dismay broke from Dan's lips, but with a sudden leap he reached the old crook and fastened a grip on his throat.

"Well, you are right!" he said, savagely. "And now you know the kind of a man you have to deal with. If Satan is not in that closet, there is one in this room whom you should fear fully as much!"

Beazley Nuggins did not struggle to break away; he knew better than that, for he had dealt with Dan Downing before. The detective was an athlete of no little renown, and all the crooks of the great city knew him as a bad man to stand up against.

"Choke away!" grunted Nuggins, desperately. "I'm an old man!"

There was a taunt in the words, and it really touched the detective, who had allowed his anger to master him for a moment. He whirled the old crook around and dropped him easily in the chair he had just left. Then he planted himself in front of the chair.

"I have fooled with you long enough, Slasher," he declared, grimly. "Now you know me, you know the kind of a man you have to deal with. I have your record down fine, and it is a black one. If you do not come to time, I will rake you again."

"Why, hain't you satisfied?" whined the old man. "You was the one as done fer me afore! But fer you, I'd never seen a day behind ther bars."

"That is true, much as you deserved it. I do not understand how you so often escaped punishment, but you always managed to cover your tracks pretty well or shift the blame of any piece of work onto other shoulders. You always were a crafty sinner; but, for all of your shrewdness, I have enough evidence to make it hot for you. If you play bluff, I may take it into my head to do so."

"W'at do ye want?"

"That makes the fourth or fifth time you have asked me that. You know what I want. If you do not give me a straight answer, it will be the worse for you! Where is Old Sal?"

"W'at do you want of her?"

"That makes no difference to you."

"Well, it do! She's my sport now. I hain't able to take keer of myself."

"I promise you shall be abundantly taken care of if you do not answer the question I have put."

"I'm givin' it to you dead straight w'en I say I don't know where she is."

"You may not know where she is, but you must tell where she stops."

"Don't know. She's left me, an' she won't tell me where she is livin', an' that's the truth."

Nuggins seemed in dead earnest, and Dan was inclined to believe he was telling the truth, after all.

"What is Old Sal to you?" asked the detective.

"She is my wife."

"You were married to her?"

"Sure, cul."

"How long ago?"

"Fore you sent me up."

"Who was she before you married her?"

"Jest plain Sal. I never knowed her by any other name."

For some little time Nuggins had been thumping his foot on the floor in a peculiar fashion, and Dan suddenly began to suspect it was a signal to some one below.

"Stop that thumping!" he instantly commanded.

Nuggins obeyed.

"What were you up to, anyway? If any of your pals come—"

The door was suddenly flung violently open, and Scrimpy's excited face appeared.

"Dey're comin', boss!" he cried.

"Who?" asked Dan.

"Two mugs from down below!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Beazley, triumphantly. "They heard ther signal. You're trapped, Dan Downing—trapped!"

Dan sprung toward the door of the little room. As he did so, two men appeared.

A cry of astonishment broke from the detective's lips.

The men were Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson!

The toughs were once more found!

But would the knowledge do Dan any good? He was in a tight corner.

"At him!" howled The Slasher. "It is Double-voice Dan, the houn'!"

That was enough for the two crooks. They knew and hated the ventriloquist detective.

With shouts they leaped forward, Gibson flourishing a sand-bag.

The detective tried to draw his revolver, but the hammer caught, and he was forced to use his fists.

Back went both Murphy and Gibson before his terrible blows.

The Slasher resolved to take a hand, and he came at the detective from behind.

But, Scrimpy was around.

"Hold on dere, old buzzard!" shrilly cried the gamin. "I'm in dis row, an' I count!"

He caught Nuggins's foot and sent the old crook crashing to the floor.

Once more Dan tried to get out his revolver.

The two toughs were close upon him when he did so, and there was a knife in Bark Murphy's hand.

"I'll cut yer heart out!" snarled the tough.

Up came Dan's revolver, and then a blow from Gibson's sand-bag knocked the weapon from the detective's hand.

That blow seemed to daze Dan. He had enough energy to strike Murphy a blow that prevented the villain's knife from drawing blood, though the keen blade cut Dan's clothes.

Then the sand-bag got in its work once more.

Dan was struck on the side of the head and fell heavily to the floor, stunned, and for the moment was at the mercy of his deadly foes!

Both Murphy and Gibson stood as if astounded at their victory, gazing down at the body of the fallen man.

"We've downed him!" cried Gibson.

"And I'll finish him!" snarled Murphy, the knife quivering in his hand. "It will be the best job we ever done. This dog has g'in us jest dead heaps of trouble. I'll rip him once fer luck!"

But when he started for the helpless man, he suddenly paused: Scrimpy was on hand!

With a quick movement the gamin had snatched Dan's revolver from the floor, placed himself astride the stricken detective and drew a "dead bead" on Bark Murphy.

"Back off dere, you zoorlogical antiquity!" he squealed. "If you come any nearer dis chick, he'll blow a hole in you big enough to fling a cat t'rough. Dat's der kind of a cuckoo I am! See?"

Of course Murphy halted in astonishment.

"You little fool!" snarled Bark. "We'll hev ter finish you too! You'd blow on us!"

"Youse mean dat I'd blow t'rough ye. I'm dangerous, I am! I'm givin' it ter yer on der dead level dat I mean biz. W'en I mean biz, I don't 'low no foolin'. Git away off 'fore I begin ter practice on ye wid dis gun!"

"We'll kill ye; ye little gutter grub!"

"Bet yer two ter one I do der fu'st killin'. I'm great on der shoot. W'en I begin dere's goin' ter be somethin' drop wid a dull thud."

The two toughs exchanged glances.

"Put down dat gun!" ordered Gibson, trying his hand at intimidation.

"Nary put," was the retort.

"You can't git out of here."

"You tink so; but dat's 'cause youse don't know. See?"

"W'at do yer mean?"

"Well, jest youse two blokes wait a bit longer an' ye'll find out."

"Hear the little duffer! It's only a bluff!"

"Say!" cried Scrimpy; "w'at youse take us fer? Tink we was fools enough ter walk inter dis kind of a trap an' not have it all fixed?"

"What fixed?"

"O., you'll find out in two or t'ree minutes," was the cool retort.

Murphy and Gibson began to look uneasy.

"W'at's der kid drivin' at?"

"Blowed if I know!"

Scrimpy actually laughed. He did not seem in the least alarmed.

"Did youse tink we was fools enough ter come in dis hole widout puttin' der perlice on? Not much! I heard der old bloke t'umpin' on de floor, an' I jest give der signal from der window. Der coppers has der house surrounded now, bet yer boots!"

Then the two toughs were really alarmed.

"Holy smoke!" cried Murphy. "If that's so, we're in fer it!"

Then the rascals made all haste to get out of that room, thinking of nothing but their own safety.

Beazley Nuggins was also frightened, and followed them, crying:

"Ther roof! ther roof!"

But the two toughs did not seem to hear the old man's words.

Scrimpy laughed derisively.

"High jinks!" he snickered. "Dat was jest der slickest! Worked it jest as nice as grease! Bet dere hain't a cop widin seven blocks!"

"But how'm I goin' ter git der boss out? Dey've knocked him silly dis time. Got ter git him clear some way, or bu'st! Dat's w'at's der matter."

But Scrimpy was delighted to discover Dan was coming round. The blow of the sand-bag had been a glancing one, and the detective was simply stunned. Dan groaned and opened his eyes.

"Hoopee!" cried Scrimpy. "Dat's right, boss! Git a brace on! Dem skunks has skipped! Now's our time to vanish!"

"Scrimps."

"Yes."

"What has hap— Ha! I remember!" Dan suddenly sat up and looked around in wonder.

"They knocked me over," he muttered, "but I seem to be all right. Why didn't they finish the job?"

"Well, boss," said Scrimpy, modestly; "dere was a feller as pu' in an objection—a boy about my size wid a gun!"

"You don't mean to say you kept those toughs from knifing me?"

"Dat's w'at," triumphantly, as the gamin held up the revolver.

There was a look of wonder in Dan's eyes. He lifted his hand to his head, while his gaze was fastened on Scrimpy with an expression of growing admiration.

"Scrimps, you're worth your weight in gold!"

The street Arab's eyes shone.

"Oh, come off! he said. "Youse make me blush! I jest done me level best, Mister Dan!"

"A hero could have done no more!"

"Well, I hain't no hero—not much! But, we're bote apt ter be angels or somethin' else if we don't take a sneak while der chumps are lookin' fer cops."

"What are they looking for them for?"

"Oh, I give dem a great bluff 'bout havin' der place surrounded. Dey took a skip 'fore der coppers dropped on dem."

"Ha! I see!"

"But dey're apt ter come scootin' back here w'en dey finds dey've been fooled. We'd better slide an' slide lively."

"That is true," assented Dan, slowly getting to his feet. "I am not very lively yet, but we will move out as swiftly as possible under the circumstances."

His head was throbbing with a dull pain, and for a moment everything swam around him. He put his hand on Scrimpy's shoulder to steady himself.

Just at that moment hoarse cries and the heavy tramping of feet came from the stairway.

Scrimpy sprung out and took a look down the stairs. Then he came rushing back to the side of the detective.

"Too late!" he cried. "Dem two blokes is comin' back, an' dere's four or five odders wid dem! We're in fer it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE PARK.

A MINGLING of emotions filled Rodney Wayne's heart when he had finished reading the communication from Luona. He was both elated and cast down. He was elated because she confessed she still loved him, and he was cast down because she declared she could never see him again.

Never again!

The words seemed to ring in his ears as if he had heard them mournfully spoken by those red lips he had kissed so passionately in that awful moment of danger.

Never again!

Was it to be so? Was he to never look into those beautiful eyes again?

No, no; he would not believe fate could be so cruel to him! He would not have it so!

The thought of never seeing her again filled him with a sensation of madness. He repeated again and again to himself that life would not be worth living without her. He could not give her up.

But how could he find her? She was hiding from him, and he might search in vain.

He crushed the note in his hand, and strode up and down the room like a maniac.

"I will find her!" he cried. "I must! She is all in all to me! For her I will make any sacrifice! I will give up even my honor!"

"Honor? Yes, for I shall have to sacrifice that if I prove false to poor Iva now. But Iva is nothing compared to my beautiful dark-eyed Luona! I thought I really loved Iva, but my love for her was like a tiny brook. My love for Luona is a mountain torrent!"

Rodney Wayne was not a man to do a dishonorable act without a pang, but the fair and mysterious Luona seemed to have bewitched him completely. The thought of being false to the charming girl who had trusted him perfectly, was very repugnant to him; but he was of a passionate nature, and the dark-eyed maiden he had found in the burning building had aroused his blood.

After a time, he smoothed out the sheet of paper and again read her message to him:

"You are so far above me we can never be anything to each other."

Again and again he read that sentence.

What did it mean?

He knit his brows and puzzled over it.

"Ah! sweet Luona!" he murmured; "I think I understand you. You have discovered I am a rich man, and you are probably poor. You think we could never be anything to each other for that reason. You think I would never accept you as an equal, and my regard for you would be of an improper kind."

"You do not know the hold you have on me, little one! I am not so far above you, for you have all the radiant beauty of God's fairest handiwork—woman! I love you, and I accept you, not as my equal, but as my superior!"

Then he read on:

"What must you think of me? My cheeks burn with shame as I think of the words I spoke when you held me in your arms with the fire rising around us."

"Think of you, Luona? If you were here, I

would tell you what I think of you! Your cheeks need not burn with shame, for those words now fill my heart with joy. The memory of them will always remain with me!"

Some of our sweetest memories are turned to gall and wormwood by the wizard touch of time!

Then he read on—read her declaration that life had been worth the living for those few moments of joy when they were together in the doomed building, facing what seemed certain death.

How that letter fired him—how it stirred his blood! He little dreamed of the witchery in it! He only knew she declared the very thoughts which burned within his own heart.

And then she bade him good-by so mournfully. There was a tear-stain on the paper. She had been weeping when she wrote those words of farewell.

Then came something that puzzled him more than all the rest.

"The black past stands between us and holds us apart with its skeleton hands."

"What could she have meant by that? I do not understand it. Has she some horrible secret that preys upon her? I would I knew!"

"But I care not for her past! I will not believe she has ever willfully done anything wrong! If she has been driven to wrong, it is not her fault. I do not wish to inquire into her past; I am willing to accept her as she is. The future is what I am looking toward. Without Luona it will be a waste for me!"

What a wonderful fascination some women wield over men! It is strange—it is unexplainable! How many men have been led into the path of sin and crime by the gentle touch of a woman's soft hand.

It is woman who rules the world!

Rodney's eyes rested on the closing words of the note. He understood them. They were in Spanish.

"Adios, Rodney! Adios, salvador mio!"

Thus she bade him farewell and called him her savior. But why were the words written in Spanish?

He suddenly started.

"I have it!" he cried. "There is Spanish blood in her veins! I might have known it, had I paused to consider. And that—that is one thing she considers a barrier between us! Foolish child! It is no barrier—there can be no barrier between two souls made for each other!"

"If God lets me live, I will find her yet!"

That was his resolution, and he was in deadly earnest. He had no thought of heeding her appeal to cease searching for her. Immediately he sat down and wrote another personal. It was in the nature of an appeal and asked for a parting interview.

"If I can only meet her once more I will convince her there is no barrier between us. I will show her how much I love her, and I will not hear of anything keeping us apart. She shall become my wife."

He had decided to break with Iva, but he knew not how to go about it. He felt that he must have something like a reasonable excuse, and he was not heartless enough to go to her and declare he no longer loved her.

He tried to devise some scheme whereby he could bring her to hate him and throw him over. There were ways enough to accomplish this, but he would be forced to degrade himself publicly. He would not do that, for he remembered Luona, and he did not wish her to have anything but the highest opinion of him.

Leaving the personal to be inserted in the next issue of the *Herald*, he continued his search for the lost one. He wandered the streets and peered sharply into the faces of any lady who might prove to be Luona. His old friends were scarcely noticed—sometimes they were not noticed at all unless they boldly stopped him.

"What's got into Wayne?" they asked each other. "Is it his father's death that is making him act so strangely? He does not appear to notice a fellow on the street, but I observe he is forever staring at all the women who pass. I didn't know he was a masher."

"And if you will notice him closely now," said another, "you will discover he is not on the mash. He seems to be searching for somebody. Perhaps he has turned detective and is looking for his father's murderer."

"In that case," put in a third, "he must believe it was a woman who stabbed the colonel."

Rodney cared little what was said about him. His only care was to find the one for whom he searched.

"His wanderings led him into the Park, and there he watched the lady riders who dashed past. He spent an hour in this way."

Two figures finally attracted his attention. They were a man and a woman. The man he knew as a famous lawyer who was said to be wealthy. The woman—

He caught his breath and started forward. There was something familiar about that figure. The face—

A gasp of disappointment escaped his lips.

The face was veiled!

He watched them as they passed, and he saw

the veiled female look toward him. Then he was certain she gave a great start, and she quickly turned her head away.

"Great heavens! I believe it is Luona!" he muttered.

In another moment he had a policeman by the arm and was pointing after the receding figures.

"See!" he said, excitedly. "Do you observe that man and woman?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know the man. Who is the woman?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir."

"Do they come here often?"

"Every day."

"And does she always wear that veil?"

"She does."

"At about what time of the day do they appear?"

"At about this time."

Something seemed to tell Rodney he was on the right track. He hurried away to the nearest stables and secured a splendid horse. Then he galloped into the Park and dashed down the drive in the direction taken by the lawyer and his veiled companion.

Of course he was troubled by some questions that would arise in his mind. If it was in truth Luona with the lawyer, what were the relations of the two? That thrust itself upon him and would not down.

Here and there through the Park he rode, searching for the lawyer and the lady of the veiled face. The time slipped by, and still he did not find them.

At length, darkness came on, and he decided it was useless to search further.

That was a restless night for Rodney, and he arose haggard and unsteady in the morning. He had always been extremely temperate, but he felt the need of stimulants, and he indulged. One of his former acquaintances was astounded to find him standing at the Hoffman House bar.

In vain Rodney waited for a reply to his personal. It did not come. But that only made him the more determined to find Luona.

"She thinks it useless to see me, and she will not write again. Well, I mean to know if it is she who rides in the Park with Lawyer Falkner."

That afternoon he was on hand at the Park some time before the hour at which the policeman had said the lawyer and his companion usually arrived. He rode up and down the bridle-path, keeping near what is known as the "Scholar's Gate."

Of a sudden he decided he would not allow the lawyer and his companion to see him there. He rode out to the gate and placed the horse in charge of a man who was there for the purpose of attending to such little jobs. Then Rodney went to a seat where he could observe every one who entered and there would be little danger of his being seen. He could also watch the man in charge of his horse.

Nearly an hour passed before the lawyer and his veiled companion rode into the Park. Rodney's heart gave a great leap as he saw them.

"It is Luona!" he triumphantly told himself, as he hastened to his horse and placed a silver dollar in the hand of the man who had been attending him.

Then he mounted and rode down the decline till he came in sight of the two he had resolved to follow.

"I wonder if she will lift the veil when they are fairly within the Park?" he muttered. "If she does, I must find a way of coming upon them suddenly, so I will get a fair look at her face."

But should it prove to be Luona, what would he do? That was a question that troubled him some. How would he act? He had resolved to accost her at any hazard, but how should he bring it about without arousing the suspicion or anger of her companion?

He decided to depend on chance to bring it all about as it should be, for it was his experience that things seldom worked as they were planned.

Further and further into the Park rode the two Rodney was following. They seem to choose the least frequented ways. The pursuer wondered at this.

In vain Rodney looked for the female to lift her veil. She still kept it closely drawn about her face. There was an air of mystery about her.

As time passed, the young man began to grow desperate. They had passed far from the general throng of riders, but still the two ahead cantered slowly onward.

After a while, Rodney saw they were in earnest conversation. The gestures of both showed they were aroused and either excited or angry. Once the man half-lifted his hand as if to strike his companion, but it fell again.

"I don't like that!" muttered Rodney. "If he strikes her, I'll make him suffer for the blow!"

A curve and some shrubbery hid the two from his eyes for a moment.

Then a cry of pain and fear came back to his ears.

He knew the voice!

It was Luona's!

Down came his whip on the glossy coat of his horse, and he dashed ahead.

Sweeping around the curve, he came upon a sight that set his blood boiling in his veins.

The horses of the two riders were close together and moving onward at a rapid pace, but the man had thrown an arm about his companion's shoulders and was holding her so she could not escape him. Her head was thrown far back, and the veil had fallen from her face.

Yes, it was Luona!

But what was her companion doing?

His hand was on her throat! *He was strangling her!*

With a ringing shout of rage, Rodney plied the whip and dashed down toward the pair, every nerve atingle with a fury indescribable.

CHAPTER XX.

"COME TO ME, RODNEY!"

RODNEY saw the man was bent on murder. There was no doubt about it.

The young man had no weapons but his bare fists, but he little cared for that.

He was going to the rescue of the mysterious girl he loved!

Had there been twenty foes in his path instead of one, he would have charged them as boldly.

The man ahead was so excited that he did not appear to hear Rodney's shout. He still clung to the girl, who feebly tried to strike him in the face.

With horror, Rodney saw she was growing weak from the pressure on her fair throat.

Then he came down upon them like a whirlwind. Reversing his whip, he struck at the lawyer's head with the butt, crying:

"Drop her, you murderous cur!"

The blow was effective. With a curse of fury, the man released his hold on the girl, and then Rodney's grasp tore him from the saddle.

Both men fell heavily to the ground.

The shock stunned them for a moment, and three horses went galloping away. Two were unmounted, but the third bore a rider.

The lawyer and his assailant both arose to their knees at the same time, and then they grappled once more. Rodney had really received the worst of the fall, and he found the lawyer no mean antagonist.

"Curse you!" snarled Falkner, striking at the other's face.

Rodney avoided the blow, and they both rolled in the dust.

"You dastardly cur!" grated the furious young man. "You would have killed her if I had not appeared!"

"That is nothing to you."

"You are mistaken."

"Do you know her?" panted the lawyer, for the struggle was still continuing.

"I do."

"Then God pity you!"

For a time Rodney believed the lawyer really meant to murder him. What he had witnessed had so infuriated him that he might have done a deed for which he would afterward have repented had he been an easy victor.

But the battle served to give the rage of both men a chance to cool, and the lawyer finally broke from his youthful antagonist.

Then he jerked out a revolver and covered Rodney.

"Keep off!" he cried—"keep off, or I will shoot!"

Had his anger not been somewhat diminished, the threat would not have checked the young man. As it was, he came near rushing on the lawyer and taking his chances.

Falkner seemed to see this in Rodney's eyes, for he quickly added:

"I don't want to shoot you, but I'll do it if you crowd me!"

"And so would succeed in committing murder after one failure! Well, you are a healthy sort of person to be known as a respectable lawyer!"

Falkner winced a bit.

"Keep your tongue well in check, young man!" he snarled. "I will not stand too much of your impudence!"

"The truth is always cutting to the devil. If I had not been on hand, you would have murdered that girl!"

"I would have ended her career, that is a fact," coolly confessed the lawyer.

"I believe you lured her here for that purpose."

"Then you do not know her as well as you might. She is the one to do the luring. She is a beautiful fiend!"

"Stop! I will not listen to such words about her!"

"Which shows she has you under her devilish spell. I know you. You are Colonel Wayne's son. Take my warning and steer clear of that sorceress."

"Pah! I want none of your advice!"

"You will not heed it? Well, I did not think you would. That is the way. Let me tell you something."

"Well?"

"She will ruin you!"

Rodney made a scornful gesture.

"I am no chicken," he declared. "I have seen a little of the world."

"But in all the world there is not one other woman like her!"

"I believe you. She is divine!"

"Divine! She is *devilish*!"

Rodney clinched his hands and started toward Falkner, but the revolver stared him in the face once more.

"Don't!" advised the lawyer. "I know better than to let you get your hands on me again."

Rodney paused, a sneer on his face.

"You are a brave man!" he cried, a scornful ring in his voice. "Put up your revolver and meet me like a man! I will agree to make you swallow that word!"

"I am not desirous of a thrashing."

"You deserve one."

"You may think so."

"The vile words you have spoken prove it!"

There was something like a look of pity in the lawyer's eyes.

"I see you are fully under the spell of that female," he said. "She will drag you down!"

"That is enough!" was the grated retort. "Do not speak of her again! If you do, I am afraid I shall forget you hold a revolver."

"Which would be unfortunate—for you. But remember I have warned you."

Then the two men parted.

Rodney was in a strange state of mind, and for a time, he did not remember the loss of his own horse. When it all came to him, he reported to several policemen. He made no further effort to find the animal.

He had seen Luona, but he had not even spoken a word to her. He had been instrumental in saving her life, for which he thanked God. He looked on Falkner as a villain of the deepest dye albeit there was something mysterious about his relations with the beautiful girl he had attempted to kill.

Rodney afterward regretted he had not questioned Falkner more closely, for the lawyer seemed in a mood for talking about the strange girl.

After all his trouble, he had only been able to find Luona and immediately lose her again. Now, would he have to go all over the search?

He was in a really desperate mood, for it seemed as if things conspired against him.

And then, what he would have most avoided, he came face to face with Rupert Delmar.

"Hello, Rodney, my boy!" called Rupert, cheerfully grasping his hand. "Why, what in the world has struck you? Your clothes are dusty and torn!"

Rodney had forgotten his wretched condition, and something like a curse came through his teeth as he realized what a spectacle he must present on the street.

"Had a tumble in the Park," he curtly explained.

"A tumble?" questioned Rupert, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes; horse threw me."

"You don't mean it!"

"It is a fact."

"Such a rider as you thrown! By Jove, old man! I find it hard to swallow that!"

Rodney protested it was true, and Rupert drew him into a bar-room where he could brush his clothes.

When Rupert spoke of Iva, Rodney became greatly embarrassed, and he soon found an excuse for leaving his friend, with whom he had always been so cordial and free.

Rupert did not like Rodney's manner, and he watched the companion of other days till his form was swallowed in the throng.

"He acts mighty odd," thought Rupert. "I wonder what has come over the fellow? He was not at all like his old self. Somehow he chilled me."

Rodney hurried home, anathematizing his luck and being really very little like his usual self.

That night he roamed the streets till two o'clock, but not a glimpse did he catch of the face for which he sought. Then he went home and to bed. There he thought of a way to find Luona.

"Falkner shall tell me where she is," he declared. "I will wring the truth from his lips! I have stood this as long as I can."

But he did not have to approach the lawyer.

The morning's mail brought him a letter from Luona. How his hands shook as he tore it open.

The message was simply:

"Come to me, Rodney."

An address was given.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TEST OF LOVE.

His heart bounding with delight, Rodney Wayne lost not a moment in answering that summons.

"At last! at last!" his heart was crying.

His face showed his joy—his eyes were glowing. He felt that he would go to her now though legions of devils blocked his path.

He saw no one—he was not aware there was a shadow on his track.

Straight to the address she had given he went. The quarter was some better than merely respectable, though it was not exactly fashionable.

But he was not prepared for what he saw when he entered the room where she was. One glance showed him it was almost luxuriously furnished. On every hand were handsome paintings, pieces of statuary, fine bric-a-brac and elegant furniture. There was almost too much of it.

But he spent only a flitting glance on his surroundings, for his eyes saw only Luona as she rose to greet him.

Great heavens! What a vision of loveliness she was! He caught his breath convulsively and every nerve of his body tingled with delight and admiration.

She was in a loose but perfectly-fitting morning-gown of old rose, with flashes of yellow, that somehow made her look like a tigress. At her throat was a cluster of yellow flowers. Her face was flushed with the pure blush of health, and her eyes shone like twin stars. She smiled on him, and the parting of her red lips gave a glimpse of the pearly teeth beyond. What a sweet mouth it was!

She came toward him, her hands outstretched. He caught them both in his burning fingers.

"Luona!"

"Rodney!"

She tried to hold him off, but he caught her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"Thank God, I have found you!" he cried.

She gently struggled to free herself, and then she lay passive in his arms, her lashes drooping, the warm color crimsoning all her fair face.

How his heart throbbed as he gazed down at that face—the beautiful face of the dear one he had found in the burning building!

"Please, let me go!" she whispered.

"Never!" was his passionate reply—"never again, my love! I have found you, and now I will keep you always!"

She seemed a little startled by his earnest manner, for he uttered the declaration almost savagely.

"You know not what you are saying," she returned.

"Oh, but I do know! You are my light—my life! You are more than all the world to me, Luona!"

"You may think so now; but, remember, you do not know me yet."

"I do know you! I have looked into those glorious eyes and seen your perfect woman's soul!"

"Ah! you may think so, only to be undeceived in the future. You have only seen me once, Rodney."

"And the circumstances of that meeting made it equal to a hundred ordinary occasions. It was a case of love at first sight with me, Luona!"

He tried to kiss her again, but she placed one soft, white hand over his lips.

"Not now, Rodney. I have allowed you too far, already. What can you think?"

"I can think of nothing but that I am in the presence of an angel!"

"Foolish fellow!"

Foolish, indeed! But the spell of the siren was on him. She was entrancingly beautiful, and it is little wonder the young man lost his head for a time. Rodney was really in love with her. He looked on her as a creature pure and sweet—as near divine as human beings ever are.

He tried to detain her, but she released herself from his grasp and stood before him. Then he tried to recover possession of her, but she held him away.

"No, no, no!" she cautioned. "Wait, Rodney, wait! We must have a talk. I have much to say to you."

"And I to you."

She drew him toward a couch and they sat down side by side, where he could look into her eyes.

"Why were you so cruel?" he asked.

"Cruel?" in real or pretended surprise.

"Yes, you *were* cruel!"

"How?"

"In hiding from me."

"I did it for the best, Mr. Wayne."

"No, no!" was his reproachful entreaty; "do not call me that! You have spoken my given name once since I entered."

"And was too friendly, I fear."

"Too friendly, when you know I love you so! You do not mean that, darling!"

He gained possession of her hand, and she was not able to draw it away.

"You speak as if there had been no understanding between us," he declared.

"An understanding?"

"Have you so soon forgotten what occurred while we were in the burning building?"

"No; I shall never forget that!"

"Nor I. It is the memory of my life! It was then you betrayed your heart to me. You confessed you loved me, Luona; but you were cruel enough to cause me to suffer untold tortures since then."

Her eyes questioned him:

"How?"

"By hiding from me—by not allowing me to come to you when my heart was hungering for the sight of your beautiful face! Oh, it was cruel, Luona!"

"I have told you I did what I thought for the best."

"But how could such a separation be for the best? You knew I loved you, and your lips had confessed your love for me. I do not understand you."

"I feared you would not."

"Then explain."

"That is not so easy. It is the one thing I have dreaded. Do you remember what I wrote you?"

"Every word is engraven on my memory."

"Then you must know I had reasons for not seeing you—for thinking it best we never met again."

"I only know your letter was very mysterious. I did not understand it at all."

"I told you we were separated by fate—I told you how far you stood above me."

"And you must have been deranged when you wrote the words. No mere human being can rise above an angel!"

"Ah! but our social positions—"

"I care nothing for that!"

The look she gave him thrilled his blood again.

"I knew you were the noblest of men! I was not deceived! You seem to have no thought for yourself."

"How can I now that I know *you*?"

"Are you really so much in earnest?"

"Luona, can you doubt?"

"I have been told all men are full of deception."

"Whoever told you had not tested *all* men. The world is large."

She sighed and her eyes drooped.

"Do you think it cost me no pang to be separated from you, Rodney? And I had really resolved never to see you again."

"My only thought is a doubt."

"Of what?"

"Your love!"

She started back, quickly drawing her hand away. The color fled from her cheeks.

"Rodney!"

"Ah! but have you not given me reasons to doubt? You were willing to be separated from me!"

"Willing! No! But I could see no other way."

"Still I do not understand you. Your words leave me in darkness."

"How can I explain? I fear you will not understand me at all!"

"Is it so hard to make me understand?"

"Yes, it is hard. You were rich, and I poor."

"Poor? These are not the surroundings of poverty."

"And that only makes it the harder to explain. You held a position in society; I was nobody."

"That makes no difference, Luona. If you were the child of the street with only one poor dress to cover your beautiful body, I should love you just as much—just as dearly!"

She smiled.

"I see you are really honest in thinking so, Rodney."

"I am honest—I am in earnest. Luona, I love you! You are precious to me, and you would be just as dear were your surroundings those of poverty."

"But you will have to sacrifice so much for me!"

For one brief instant he thought of Iva—Iva who trusted everything to his honor. Then he said, desperately:

"No matter what the sacrifice, I am ready to make it! Why, I would give up my life for you! Is there anything a man should hold dearer than his life, unless it be the woman he loves?"

"I was thinking of you when I wrote it were better we never met again."

"Then there is no secret of yours that might keep us apart?"

A shadow fell on her face.

"Rodney."

She put out her hand, and he took it again.

"What is it, darling?"

"You say you love me."

"I do."

"I shall put that love to test."

"Name the test. I am sure I will withstand it."

"It is simply this: You must not question me concerning the past. You must be content to know me as I am."

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER THE SPELL.

RODNEY laughed.

"Is that such a very severe test?"

"Severe enough, I should say. Do not be hasty about promising."

"I can readily—"

But she checked him.

"Please do not be hasty!" she entreated.

"You may regret it."

"I am sure not."

"But you may. Think what it means, to do as I have asked."

"It means nothing."

"It means *everything*!"

She was in sober earnest; he saw that when he looked deep into the liquid depths of those glorious eyes.

"It is a simple promise to make."

"And one you may regret having given. Think of all I may have reason to conceal."

"What can so fair and beautiful a creature have to conceal that I should care to know?"

"My past life may have a shadow on it. There may be something that would destroy your love were it known to you. Think—think of that!"

"He was silent for a moment, and they looked straight into each other's eyes. She seemed to be anxiously awaiting his reply."

"Luona!"

He drew her toward him. She did not resist very much.

"Luona, it makes no difference to me what your past may have been. I will not believe it would cause you to fall the least in my estimation did I know it all. If there is anything wrong about the past, I am sure it was through no fault of yours. I promise not to question."

"Remembering what you saw yesterday, can you make that promise?"

Like a flash came the full recollection of that encounter in the Park. He remembered how he had seen her deadly danger, the hand of a would-be murderer at her throat. Only his prompt interference had saved her from death.

She was watching the working of his face, and it seemed that she read his thoughts.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, catching her breath. "Now you are beginning to understand the full extent of your promise!"

For a moment he held her off and gazed upon her rosy beauty.

"What is that man to you?"

"Already you begin to question!"

"Can't you answer that one thing?"

"Yes."

"Then do."

"He is nothing."

"What has he been?"

"Nothing."

"But he would have killed you!"

"I believe he would if you had not saved me."

"And you have often been seen riding in the Park with him."

"He was the only person I knew in this great city."

"How came you to know him?"

"Another question. I will answer."

"I am listening."

"He is a lawyer. I placed certain legal affairs in his hands."

"And so became acquainted with him?"

"Yes."

"That explanation is simple."

"And true."

"But what should bring the man to so desperate a strait that he should try to kill you?"

"Rodney, must I tell?"

It was like the appeal of a child, and at that moment she seemed more like a child than a woman. Her artless manner impressed him.

"No," he answered, "you need not tell, if you do not wish."

Then a sudden change came over her.

"But I do wish," she declared. "I will tell you, Rodney. Turn your eyes away! You look at me so steadily! How can I begin?"

"Do not begin at all."

"Yes, you must know the truth, or you will be forever doubting me. Your doubts would drive me to madness. I have found it impossible to live in New York and conceal myself from you, and now that we are to see each other sometimes, I want your confidence."

She arose and paced the carpet a few moments, her arms crossed behind her back.

He watched her every movement, wondering at the perfect poetry and and grace of this mysterious girl.

Suddenly she paused in front of him.

"Look around," she said, with a wave of her hand. "You have said my surroundings were not those of poverty. I grant that much, but a week ago my rooms looked quite different. At that time I was in doubt whether I was a beggar or not. I had placed my case in the hands of Joseph Falkner, to whom I had been recommended. He fought the case for me and succeeded in securing a settlement without bringing it to court. That will explain the change in my circumstances. To-day I am much better off than I was a few days ago, although I am not overburdened by riches, by any means."

"Now comes the hardest thing to speak of—the dastardly conduct of Falkner! I presume I gave him too much liberty, but I was alone in the city. I love riding, and I did not have an escort, so I accepted him. He seemed very kind and gentlemanly, and I had no thought of his real villainess. Never till yesterday did his true nature come to the surface. Then we were speaking of the remuneration he was to receive for his services and he made a demand which I resented."

"The wretch!" cried Rodney, in fury.

"My resentment angered him," Luona swiftly continued, "and he insulted me by insinuating my conduct had been such as to lead him to believe I would repay him as he desired. Then I threatened to turn back, but he would not allow me. We were deep in the most lonely part of the Park, and I grew afraid of the man, for his eyes gleamed with a fearful light. He still

pressed his demands, and finally he tried to embrace and kiss me."

Luona's lips were quivering as if with anger and there were tears in her eyes. Rodney caught her hands and drew her down beside him, where she rested her head on his shoulder, and he could feel her trembling form in his arms.

"He shall suffer for this!" declared Rodney. "He must be a black-hearted villain!"

"Oh, he is!" cried Luona. "When he made the assault upon me I cried out in fear, and struck him with my whip. Then he grasped me by the throat. He swore if I did not promise to do as he desired, he would strangle me on the spot! He declared my beauty had made him mad, and he really looked like a madman. What could I do? I would not promise that, though I died! I felt his fingers crushing my throat, and then—"

"I took a hand. Well, it was high time I did so! My greatest regret now is that I did not kill the dastardly dog when we fell to the ground together!"

"That would have been murder!"

"No—it would have been retribution! He deserved death! We shall meet again!"

"Oh, no, no! You must not harm him! Stop and think what it will mean!"

"I will leave the mark of my fist on his coward face!"

"You must not!"

"And why?"

"Because it may produce a scandal—it may bring us into publicity."

"He will dare do nothing."

"But he may. For my sake, you must not touch him. Promise me."

And Rodney was forced to reluctantly give the promise.

She rewarded him with a kiss.

"And now," she said, "as I have told you this much, would you not like to know more of the past—more of my life?"

"Not unless you desire to tell me."

"You trust me?"

"Fully."

"And will still trust me, though my past life remain sealed?"

"Yes, Luona."

"You are ready to promise not to ask me concerning that life?"

"I do so promise. Is there more you ask?"

"No, nothing. Rodney, you are my king!"

He held her close and kissed her again. He was happy then, for he could not look into the future.

Among his comrades, Rodney Wayne was known as a fellow of good judgment and sound sense.

What kind of a spell had this beautiful mystery cast over him, that he should become so enraptured and should so readily forget his pledge to the golden-haired girl he had asked to become his wife?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S AID.

"We's in fer it, pard!" cried Scrimpy. "Der hull gang's dead onder us!"

The situation was a startling and perilous one. Double-voice Dan was on his feet, but he had not entirely recovered from the blow that had robbed him of consciousness a short time before.

The detective did not hesitate. It seemed as if a single leap took him to the gamin's side. He saw the crowd of toughs who were coming raving up the shaky stairs, fierce to get their hands on the man whom they feared and hated.

"Stick to my heels, Scrimps!" came from his lips, and then, like an avalanche, he went plunging down the stairs!

Right into the midst of the gang he dashed.

They were not looking for such an assault. They had anticipated finding an unconscious man, guarded by a small boy and a big revolver.

Down went the toughs before the shock, and the detective made a way through their ranks with an ease that surprised himself—Scrimpy being close behind him.

"Whoop!" screamed the street Arab. "Dis is der kind of mice we is! W'en dere's cats 'round, we gits our skates on! Ob, dis is bully fun!"

He jumped over the men the detective had overthrown, managing to give Bark Murphy a kick under the chin, which brought a howl of pain from that dangerous rascal.

Dan heard the boy's words and knew Scrimpy was all right. Still he made sure no accident had befallen his youthful and gritty assistant, and they rushed along to the next flight together, Scrimpy actually laughing with keen enjoyment of the adventure.

Behind them they heard the down-thrown ruffians scrambling to their feet, howling forth their fury.

"Foller them!" screamed Hack Gibson's voice. "Don't let 'em git erway! Shoot 'em! knife 'em!"

"They're after blood, Scrimps," said Dan.

"Well, some of dem has der nose-bleed, I reckon. Ob, pard! dis is w'at I call livin'!"

Down the next flight of stairs they went, Dan taking the descent at two bounds, and the gamin

not appearing to touch only at the top and bottom.

They made their way into the street, with the gang close at their heels.

The quarter was notoriously bad, and Dan looked in vain for a blue-coat. Not a policeman was in sight.

"We've got to break away, Scrimps," asserted the detective, as they darted into an alley. "This locality stands by the gang."

"You bet!" was the vigorous retort. "Dere hain't nobodys in dis quarter but'd t'row a brick at us. We'd best continue ter slide."

Dan contemplated the advisability of sending in a police call, but it struck him as an ill-advised move. He knew the crooked class of New York so well that he felt sure Murphy and Gibson would not lose an instant in getting away from that part of the city. By the time policemen could arrive from Headquarters, the two crooks would be safe in another locality. His only hope was that he might strike a couple of officers near by.

This he was able to do when the next street was reached, and they were ready to accompany him the moment they knew who he was.

Back to the den where the detective had so nearly lost his life they went.

The game had flown.

The old house was searched from top to bottom, but it was simply time wasted.

Neither Beazley Nuggins or one of the gang was to be found.

"It strikes me they may be near," declared Dan. "They cannot have gone very far."

So he took care that the quarter was placed under police surveillance.

Scrimpy was also left on the watch.

Dan was quite disgusted with his ill-success, but he now felt he had a treasure in Scrimpy. The gamin had showed himself almost utterly without fear.

"I will make a man of him," was Dan's mental assertion. "He is built of the right timber."

Back to his office he went, and there he immediately got rid of his disguise.

Then he went at work on the case again.

Johnston the reporter was on hand to know if Dan had struck anything that would make a story, and the detective gave him some material from which he could make a very sensational article. At the same time, Dan was careful not to tell enough to give the police or the toughs an accurate idea of the plan he was following. He made the reporter give his word of honor to limit the story to just such points as the detective was willing to have appear, and while everything in the story was true, it was calculated to be misleading in regard to the detective's intentions.

In vain the police and Scrimpy watched for Murphy, Gibson or Beazley Nuggins. The trio seemed to have vanished, as if the earth had swallowed them.

Worn out with watching, Scrimpy was forced to take some sleep at last.

But he turned up the following day, as bright as a new dollar, dressed in his best clothes. His pantaloons were carefully pressed so there was a pronounced crease in the back and front of each leg, and his entire wearing apparel had been brushed till there was not so much as a speck of dirt or lint visible about it. He wore a standing collar and a flaming red necktie, while his stiff hat was given a slight cant to the left, so it sat jauntily on his head. His face and hands were as clean as soap and water could possibly make them, and the only "give-away" about the lad was the dirt under his finger-nails, which he had overlooked.

Thus "togged," Scrimpy sauntered up Broadway, holding his cane after the most approved fashion. With the exception of those tell-tale finger-nails, he was a perfect copy of the youthful dude to be seen on the street. He even caught on so far that he ogled the pretty girls as they flitted along.

"Dis is w'at I call livin'!" he observed to himself. "I feel like I owned dis street."

When he appeared in Dan's office, he walked in with a lordly air.

"Is dis Mr. Downing, der detective?" he inquired, as if Dan were an utter stranger.

"Hello, Scrimps!" smiled Dan. "What has struck you?"

The gamin drew back as if offended.

"Sir!" he haughtily exclaimed; "your familiar air is quite obtrusive. Go fall on yourself!"

The Always-on-Deck Detective whirled round in his chair and stared at his visitor.

"Have you been rushing the growler?" he demanded.

The boy's haughtiness increased.

"Dis is very conglomerous!" he stiffly asserted. "I believe youse ain't nuthin' but a common detective. Is dis der way you treats your patronizers? If dat is der constituency of der circumstantial circumloction, I'll have no funder connection wid you, sir. Come 'way off!"

"Great Scott!" and Dan arose to his feet, assuming a serious air. "The kid is deranged!"

"Kid! Oh, mum!"

"He's evidently been smoking cigarettes."

"Cigarettes! Oh, jee!"

"I think I will call the police. He keeps his

mouth open so much he'll catch cold in the vacancy that should be occupied by brains."

"Dis is an insult! I demand satisfaction!"

"A duel?"

"Dat's w'at."

"He's surely crazy!"

"Sir, I challenge youse to eat hash wid me at my boarding-house on Sixt' avernool!"

"I cave!" cried Dan, promptly. "The thought blanches my cheek!"

"Do you 'pollygize?"

"Instantly."

"Dat settles it. Shake, pard! How's trix? Dis is a large day. Set down an' make yerself easy. W'at's der lay? Any p'int?"

Dan sat down laughing.

"Scrimpy," he declared, "you are in the lead!"

"Oh, I kinder t'ought I took der plum. Jest t'ought I'd come in here an' show youse der style I's livin' up ter now. Say, don't yer t'ink you'd best put my name on der front of dat sign out dere? Make it 'Stubbs & Downin', Special Detectives.'"

"I'll think it over," smiled Dan. "In the mean time, I have a new lay for you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BOY SHADOW.

"ALL squee! Jest put me on. I'm reddy fer biz, boss. Jest spread in dese togs ter see how it'd feel."

"Well, you had better keep them on."

"W'at—w'en I'm 'tendin' ter biz?"

"Sure."

"Oh, say! dese ain't workin' duds."

"And you are not a working man."

"No?"

"Certainly not."

"Say, I'm a professional gent?"

"Hit it dead center."

"Well, dat's great!"

"Never thought of that before, eh?"

"Nope. I'm swellin'. Git it, pard!"

"What?"

"Der hoop."

"Hoop?"

"Yep."

"What for?"

"To put on me. 'Fraid I'll bu'st wid me big feelin's."

Dan laughed.

"We'll have to run the risk, for I have no hoop handy."

"I'll have ter git annoder hat, anyway."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Dis feels 'bout t'ree sizes too small. Me head's expandin'."

"Well, for the pointer I was to give you. Has the swelling of your head affected your hearing?"

"Not a bit."

"All right. Listen. You know Rodney Wayne?"

"Sure."

"Well, he is acting decidedly queer. It may all be on account of his father's murder, but I fancy not. There has been a great change in his manner since he passed through that fire on Sixth avenue."

"Dat didn't 'fect his head, did it?"

"I don't know. I am really at a loss to understand him. He seems to have lost much of his interest in bringing to justice the murderer of his father, though he still keeps me on the case. He still wishes the murderer punished, but he is not so fierce about it as he once seemed. He appears to have cooled in a remarkable manner."

Scrimpy nodded to show he was listening closely, and Dan went on:

"To me his manner is enigmatical—"

"Stop right dere!" cried Scrimpy. "Bring on der Dictionary!"

"Well, then, I will say his manner is puzzling."

"Dat's better; I grasp. Let her slide."

"It does not seem consistent with him as I have sized him up. I have talked with him, but have not been able to get any satisfaction out of it. And now I want you to get at the truth of it all."

"How?"

"I want you to shadow him."

"All right."

"You know he is engaged to be married?"

"Yep. I've seen der gal. She's a panzy!"

"Well, see if there is any trouble between them. It may be a lovers' quarrel—nothing more."

"If dere's a row on, I'm goin' ter sail in an' see if I can't scoop dat gal. She's my style, an' I hain't goin' ter hold it 'ginst her jest 'cause her dad's rollin' in boodle."

"I want you to follow Rodney Wayne everywhere, as far as it is possible to do so. If he goes to any particular place, find out who he meets there. Use your own judgment in moments when you are doubtful about the proper move to make and report if you discover anything worth reporting."

"O. K. But how 'bout der odders?"

"What others?"

"Murph, Gib an' Nuggins."

"I'm goin' on a still hunt for them. Keep

your peepers peeled for anybody who looks like Jack Backstay."

"You bet."

"That's all."

Scrimpy promptly departed.

There was a shadow on Rodney's track of which he did not dream. The boy performed his duty as faithfully as he possibly could.

And so, at last, Scrimpy followed Rodney when he went to meet Luona at the address given in her curt note. The gamin saw the change in the cast of the young man's face, and he fancied something of an agreeable nature had brought it about.

"Before dis he looked like he was on der edge of kermittin' suicide," thought the boy shadow. "Now he looks as happy as if he'd struck a gold mine. Wonder w'at dis is goin' ter pan out? I want ter know w'at made all der change."

The youthful detective was a most ingenious inventor of stories which would aid him in accomplishing any purpose, and one of these yarns let him in close behind Rodney. Up the stairs darted the boy tracker till he sighted the man he was after.

Rodney was just disappearing through the door that opened into Luona's rooms.

"So he's tumbled in dere," muttered the gamin, as he inspected the door. "He's in, an' I'm out. Dat's der size of it. I heard der click of dat door as she went to, and der sound tells me she's locked fast. Hain't no good tryin' ter foller him in dere, an' it might not prove healthy if I could. All dere is fer me is ter squat right here."

He looked around for a place of concealment, which he was fortunate in finding. There was a dark corner that commanded a full view of the door beyond which Rodney Wayne had disappeared, and in that corner Scrimpy ensconced himself.

"Dis hain't so very bad," he thought, as he crouched there. "Der wu'st is dat I'll git a bag in der knees of me locherbreens. Dan's got ter fod up another pair w'en dese git so I look stale. I'm in der swim now, an' I mean ter do de correc'. Dat's w'at's der matter."

For some time he remained quietly in the corner. A man came down-stairs and passed without seeing him. Had he been detected, Scrimpy had a crafty story ready for telling, but it was not necessary to resort to such an artifice.

Occasionally the boy would listen at the door. Sometimes he would hear the hum of voices, but could distinguish no words.

"Hokey, don't I wish I was where I could hear all dat was said!" muttered the shadow. "I'd give dead heaps ter know w'at was goin' on."

He faithfully remained at the door till Rodney departed.

When the door opened, Scrimpy was once more in the dark corner. He saw it swing partially open, and his keen eyes took in everything thus revealed.

Rodney Wayne appeared, and with him was Luona. She was clinging to his hand, and he seemed to be leaving her with the utmost reluctance.

The boy shadow nearly uttered a whistle of amazement as he saw the beautiful girl with the young man.

"So dat's der way der cat jumps!" was his mental exclamation. "Dat's w'at's der matter! Great king! Dis comes nigh knockin' me silly! I t'ought dat feller was dead stuck on der gal wid der gold hair, an' now he's here wid one as has black hair! Oh, dis is gittin' interestiner right along! I reckon I'm tumblin' onter der biz."

"Good-by, Rodney!" came tenderly from the lips of the fair girl.

"Good-by, darling!" he returned, drawing her close once more. "It is only for a little time."

"A little?" reproachfully.

"But it will seem an age to me!" he hastily added, the very inflection of his voice telling how enraptured he was.

"And to me an eternity!" she declared, clasping her hands behind his neck and lifting her face to him.

He held her close and kissed her again and again.

Oh, jee!" thought Scrimpy. "Dat's sweetness! My mum! hain't dat der kind! Don't know's I'd blame him if he wa'n't 'gaged ter der odder one, fer dat gal is a stunner! She's jest der kind dat sets der men howlin' crazy, dat's w'at! She's got der grab on Mister Rodney!"

At length Rodney departed and the door was closed. The boy still crouched in the corner.

"Dunno w'at ter do," he softly muttered. "Dunno whether I'd better foller him or stay right here. Boss tole me ter find out 'bout any peoples dat cove went ter see, an' so I guess I'll linger. I kin pick him up later."

For two long hours after Rodney departed he remained in that corner, his patience seeming tireless.

Then the door opened and a woman came out. She turned and locked the door behind her, after which she drew a veil over her face and descended the stairs.

In the corner Scrimpy crouched like one paralyzed. He was too astounded to move.

The woman going down the stairs he knew. He had seen her face fairly before she concealed it behind the veil.

She was the haggish creature known as Old Sal!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VAILED FACE.

"WELL, dis do beat t'under!" gasped Scrimpy, executing a dance of delight the moment his astonishment subsided enough to allow him to do so. "Who'd a t'ought it! Follered dat young jay an' he brought me right to de old gal! Hooray! I'm in wid bote feet, as de Chicago gal said w'en she was baiting at Coney Island."

The delight of the gamin knew no bounds. Chance enabled him to make a "hit" in the detective line.

He slipped along the rail and watched the old woman descend the stairs, then he followed at a safe distance. When Old Sal reached the street, the youthful shadower was on her track.

"Oh, hully gee!" he snickered. "Dis is nuts! Hain't I der luckiest chick in dis town! Well, you kin wager your scudi! I'm a dandy!"

Never had the gamin felt more satisfied with himself. His heart was beating high with satisfaction.

"Dis'll jest tickle de boss!" he thought. "Dis old gal is a mighty slippery one, an' she lays low de most of de time. Jest now she's got dat chromo face of hern kivered mighty close, so dere don't nobody git a squint at it."

"Well, I don't blame her. It might scare some weak-minded Johnny inter a fit or sumthin'. Dat phiz is a warnin' ter hoomanity, dat's w'at it is! W'en a shemal begins ter look like dat she best go take a soke off der dock."

"But, great Jim! looker der togs she's got on! Dat hain't der kind of a rig Old Sal gineraly sports. Dat's purty neat fer a gal of advanced age. It's real 'spectable, an' all dat. Old Sal gineraly runs in rags."

"Reckon der old lady must have made a strike, dat's w'at's der matter. But how? when? where? It couldn't bin her face dat done it fer her—great Jinks, no! An' still, on second t'ought, it might. She may be exhibitin' at some dime museum as a freak."

The vailed woman made straight for the nearest elevated station, and Scrimpy was not far behind. He had no thought of missing the train that she took, but he came mighty near it, just the same. He dodged in just as the guard was closing the gate, which gave him a thump.

The guard growled out something at the boy, which caused Scrimpy to grin and observe:

"Oh, I don't often git left!"

"You'll get killed some day!" was the retort.

"'Twon't be none of your funeral, mister."

"Well, I may find it necessary to provide the subject."

"Come off! All der men youse ever killed is livin' now!"

"I mean to do better when I begin on a boy."

"Well, youse best be in trim, fer I'm a tough boy. See?" And the gamin canted his hat over one eye and struck an attitude with his cane ready.

The guard was forced to laugh, and he observed, in better nature:

"You're a fly one! I'll risk you!"

The street Arab doffed his hat and made a bow.

"Tanks," he said. "Excuse de blush on me nose. Dat's der sign left by me last beer. So long, old man. See you at Del's."

He had been keeping his eyes on the old woman all the time, and he now entered the car, taking a seat where he could keep guard over the one he was shadowing and not be suspected. Assuming a most idiotic expression, he thrust the head of his cane into his mouth and sucked it after the fashion of the most inane dude.

For all of the silly expression on the lad's face, there was not a person in the car whose brains were more active. He saw everything transpiring, and when Old Sal left the car at one end he left it at the other.

Fortunately, quite a number got off at the same station, so he alone did not fall under the notice of Old Sal.

Reaching the street, the old hag started toward the East Side.

Scrimpy followed.

"Youse don't shake me dis time!" he asserted.

It was on Maiden Lane, well down toward the water front, that the old woman suddenly vanished into a doorway.

"Mebbe I'll git killed dere," thought Scrimpy, "but live or die, I'm arter her. Desetogs hain't jest der kind ter wear in dat kind of a place."

But when he got inside, he was unable to tell into what room the old woman had vanished, for he had not thought it policy to follow so closely he would be suspected should she see him.

He immediately set about trying to devise some scheme whereby he could visit all the rooms, a course he might have followed in a desperate strait.

But good judgment warned him, and he quietly descended the stairs and crossed the street.

Ensconcing himself in a doorway, he watched and waited.

His patience was not greatly taxed.

Not more than half an hour passed before a familiar-appearing figure came out of the doorway.

"Dere ye be, old gal!" laughed the boy. "I t'ought ye wouldn't play me der trick a secon' time. You're a daisy, Sallie! I see you're on der move, so I'll git me skates on once more."

Again the boy shadower was on the track of the veiled woman. He now redoubled his caution, for he felt there was need to do so. If Old Sal had observed him on the train or when he left it, she would at once become suspicious if she saw him following her now.

"I'm in der game ter win," he mentally declared. "I sticks ter her if she leads me inter a trap. I've got a reputash ter sustain, dat's w'at's der matter! I wants ter do der t'ing that would please Danil if he knowed it. Got me eye on promotion."

Old Sal walked quite swiftly for one of her age, but it was simply sport for Scrimpy to keep her in sight. He really enjoyed it.

The old woman seemed lost, so Scrimpy thought, for she paused on a corner and glanced around. But she still kept the veil down.

While Sal was looking around, the boy was apparently regarding the stock in trade of an Italian fruit-vender. It was remarkable what an interest he suddenly took in that stock of apples and grapes. He put his hand in his pockets and seemed in doubt about the advisability of buying the whole cart-load.

"Nice-a grape; nice-a ap," blandly observed the native of "sunny Italy." "Buy-a da grape? Turtwenty cent-a da pound. Buy-a da ap? Tree cent-a da piece."

"Well," said Scrimpy, slowly, looking out of the corners of his eyes toward the corner where the veiled woman was, "I think I'll hev 'bout a pound of—*nothin'!*"

The final word was an exclamation, for he saw the woman suddenly disappear around the corner. He was off like a flash, leaving the disappointed Italian to stare after him, and mutter angrily to himself.

"No, ye don't do dat, me dear!" laughed Scrimpy, as he reached the corner and saw the one he was shadowing hurrying along the dirty street. "If you has tooken a tumble ter dis child, he hain't goin' ter let yer give him de slip so easy. Oh, I'm stickin' like a plaster!"

He was constantly expecting the woman would look back to see if she was followed, but she did nothing of the kind. Straight ahead she went, seeming perfectly familiar with her surroundings.

"Old Sal knows every crook an' turn of dese parts," thought the following boy. "If she has spotted me, she'll be sure to make a dodge. But I has been around here some, an' I'm great on dodgin'. I jest wish Dan was here. He'd clap fins on her so mighty sudden it'd make her head swim, dat's so!"

But Dan was not there, and it was Scrimpy's duty to keep track of Sal till he could reach a place where the detective could be summoned.

Suddenly the figure of the woman turned into a narrow way between two buildings.

Scrimpy darted ahead, and was just in time to see her disappearing into a low doorway set in a brick wall.

"Count me in!" he muttered, as he promptly glided down between the grim walls.

At the doorway he hesitated a moment. Coming from the open light of the street, it was strangely dark in there. But he determined to enter, the door being slightly ajar. Cautiously he pushed it open and entered.

Then he was suddenly grasped by skinny hands, and the uncertain light showed him he was in the clutch of the person he had shadowed. In his ear a triumphant voice snarled:

"Ha, ha! you young dog of a spy! I'll strangle ye! I'll fix ye so ye won't foller another! I'll kill ye!"

Scrimpy tried to cry out, but those bony fingers reduced the sound to a horrible gurgle. He could not breathe! The creature into whose grasp he had fallen seemed to have the strength of a man. He felt that Old Sal really meant to kill him. With all his strength, he struck at that hidden face. The blow tore away the veil, and he saw—

Not the horrible features of Old Sal!

The face thus exposed was that of the old crook, Beazley Nuggins!

CHAPTER XXVI.

CATCHING A "LAMB."

Two men were seated in the darkest corner of a cellar saloon. They were conversing in cautious tones, as if fearful of being overheard. They appeared like thugs of the most desperate order, and their faces were covered by heavy beards, which, in a stronger light, would have looked decidedly unnatural.

Close at hand was another man, whose head rested on his arms, which, in turn, rested on a round-topped table. From his heavy breathing and occasional muttering, it became evident he was asleep. Glasses and a decanter were on the table, but it was a significant fact that they were empty.

There were other tables, at some of which customers were sitting, and at the further side of the cellar was a bar. Some of the customers at the tables were women—creatures of the street, fallen and degraded. It was their business to lure men into the place and induce them to purchase drinks. In that dive many a man had been drugged and robbed, sometimes to be found dead in the street the next day.

And there are scores of such hot-beds of crime in great and enlightened New York!

The bar was doing a good business. A show had been made of partitioning off the place where the tables were, but it was merely a show, the arches being so large that it was all one room.

The two bearded men leaned on the table, and talked with their heads close together. At their side the third man snored and muttered, as if his dreams made him restless.

"Say, dis is gittin' mighty t'in!" asserted one of the bearded men. "I don't like dis havin' ter dodge der coppers an' keep shady all der time."

"No more does I!" growled the other. "But dere hain't no help fer it."

"An' we didn't git nuthin' out of der job either. Dat's der wu'st."

"No use ter try it in dat quarter. I told yer better, but you t'ought we'd be able ter do it dere as well as on de Bowery."

"An' I t'ought we might make a bigger haul. All der moneyed blokes live up in dat section."

"But a feller can't take a sneak dere der way he kin down dis way."

"Dat's so."

"Dere hain't no alleys ner nuthin' ter dodge t'rough w'en der peelers gits arter ye."

"Nary one."

"It was too bold, an' dat was w'at I told yer 'fore we tried it. Now yer see how it's kept us layin' shy. If we could git out of der city."

"But we can't."

"Now youse shoutin'! Der perlice is watchin' every way of leavin', an' we'd be pulled if we tried it."

"Reckon we'll hev ter make der rif' some way."

"Well, we can't keep in hidin' all der time. We's in danger comin' here, but I was dead tired bein' shut up dere."

"An' me. Dat blamed detective is makin' it hot; he's der wu'st!"

"Dan Downin'?"

"Yep."

"Course he is. I've wanted ter finish dat cuss fer a long time, but I's never had der chance."

"Oh, he'll git it some night!"

"You bet!"

"If he hadn't come roun' tryin' ter do Beazley Nuggins, we could laid still in der old nest."

"I'd been all right anyway if we hadn't run inter him dere. Blame der Slasher! W'ot does we keer 'bout him?"

"Nuthin'."

"He's too old ter be any good any more."

"Yep; he's out of der biz."

"Der best t'ing he kin do is ter die."

"Dat's so."

"If 'tadn't bin fer dat kid, we'd done der ven-triloquizer."

"Sure. He'd never been able ter ventril any more."

"But dat boy'd grit."

"Der clean stuff."

"His eddycashun's in der wrong direction, dough. W'at's der use of bein' honest w'en yer kin be somet'ing else jest as well?"

"The kid will git killed if he keeps on runnin' wid der flies. It hain't healthy."

"Not any at all. Say, hear dat chump snore! He's dead tired. I wonder if it'd pay ter go t'rough him?"

"Course not; take a look at his rig. He's blowed his last cent."

"Well, he's goin' ter be fired w'en der waiter comes round dis way next time. Dis hain't no hotel."

"Not much. Wonder w'ere's Red Mag?"

"She hain't here."

"No. I've been lookin' fer her."

"W'at yer t'inkin'?"

"She might pull us in a plum. We's got ter make a strike, dat's all!"

"We'd do der pickin' if she'd git us der bird."

"Sure."

"Funny she hain't round."

"Dat's so."

"Now if Old Sal was only as good a looker as Mag, we could make some great hauls."

"Dat old gal gits money some way."

"You're talkin'."

"How?"

"I'll never tell yer dat."

"W'at kind of biz is she workin' wid dat old sailor?"

"Ask me somet'in easy!"

"He hain't got no stuff."

"Nary red."

"Still she keeps him fast dere in dat room."

"Yep; an' we has der job of watchin' him."

"An' starvin' him."

"Dat's in der bargain."

"Dat old woman's der devil!"

"You've hit it!"

"She's got a grudge 'g'inst der old sailor."

"Must be dat way."

"Dat's w'at's der matter."

"An' she's goin' ter punish him oy starvin'."

"Dead sure."

"Well, it hain't nuthin' ter us."

"Not so long as she pays fer havin' him watched an' fed a little dry bread now an' den."

"But she don't pay none too much for dat."

"Says she pays all she kin 'ford'."

"Mebbe she does; mebbe she don't."

"Yon don't trust her?"

"Nary time. She's a cat!"

"I'd like ter foller her an' git onter der snap she's workin'. I'd do dat, too, if it wasn't fer der danger we's in jest now."

Suddenly they lowered their voices and talked so low that there was no possibility of any one overhearing them.

About this time, the man at the next table stirred and started up.

"Wh-wh-where th' blazes be I?" he mumbled. "Thought I was in my bunk aboard ship and I heard ther call to roll out. This looks kinder hazy—kinder hazy. Wh-wh-what makes shings go round sho? I don't un'stand it. Wh-wh-what's all them lights out zere? I must be drunk!"

The final words were uttered in a solemn manner, as if the thought had just occurred to him. For some moments he sat nodding, and then he began to mumble once more:

"Guess th's sho—guess I be drunk! Most 'stonishin' thing! Must be on shore, blow my eyes! Drunk—an' I'm dry—dry as fish! Noshin' here to drink."

He inspected the glasses before him in a grave manner. The two men at the next table did not pay any attention to him. He saw them and regarded them quizzically for a bit, and then he noticed a half-emptied glass of beer near his side of the table. Without a word he reached over and secured it. He was lifting it to his lips when one of the men saw him.

"Hey, dere, drop it!" was the instant command.

The intoxicated individual obeyed literally, and the glass was shattered in pieces on the floor.

"Scuse me!" he bowed. "Wash th't your beer, mate? Didn't notiss you was there."

"You blamed lyin' bum!" snarled the owner of the spilled beer. "You knew it was mine! You hain't got der price, an' dat's der matter! Blowed if I don't do you fer dat!"

He was so furious that he half-arose, but his companion pulled him down.

"Easy, youse!" he commanded. "Don't git in no fight here. Dis hain't no time fer it."

"But looker der bloke! He spilled all dat good beer. He was goin' ter guzzle it 'cause he hain't got der price."

"Scuse me," put in the man at the other table, making a drunken bow. "Wh-wh-what you mean w'en you say I hain't got ther price? If you mean I hain't got plenty of scudi, take a look at this."

Fishing down into a pocket, he drew forth a large roll of crisp-looking bills, which he flourished above his head.

"Talk about price!" he crowed. "I can buy this whole place! I'm loaded with this stuff, as well as with bad rum. Shipmates, I'm a jolly dog, an' don't yer fergit it! I thought tha' was my beer. Seein' it was yourn, I'll sbet 'em up all round. Drink wiz me?"

Drink with him? Well, yes! How their eyes glistened at sight of those bills! Here was game flung right in their way. Drink with him? They were ready to drink with him till he could not see; and the sooner he got into a sightless condition the better it would suit them.

The one who had been so angry arose to his feet, bowing.

"Beg yer pardon, cul," he entreated. "I t'ought youse was a bum cove w'ot I knows. I see I made a mistake. It's all right; I didn't mean nuthin'. Dat's all straight. Drink? Well, I don't care if I do."

The intoxicated man arose to his feet and made such a profound bow that he nearly upset himself.

"You're puffic'ly 'scusable," he assured. "Don't mention it. I'm a gentleman of the shee—the high shee. I'm a shailor, but I don't go 'fore ther mast any more. Firsht mate's berth shuits me. My name's Barnacle—Ben Barnacle."

"My name's Smith," declared the mollified tough. "Der name of me friend here is Jones. We're in der wholesale meat business." Just loud enough for his comrade to understand, he added:

"An' we've caught a lamb dis time!"

"Hey?" from the sailor. "What did you say last, mate? I didn't quite catch it."

"I said it was kinder close in dis place."

"Close—close? Well, I dunno. Anyhow, I'm dry. Will yer take shumshin', mates?"

"Don't keer if we do," promptly answered Smith and Jones, in unison.

Then the half-intoxicated sailor rapped loudly for the waiter, who soon appeared and demanded what was wanted.

"Whisky," said Barnacle, as he wheeled his chair round to the table of the two roughs—"whisky for three. Git ther wind in yer sails now an' make a quick cruise. We're dry—oh, so dry!"

"Oh, so dry!" echoed Smith and Jones. The waiter was not long in filling the order, and Barnacle thrust a five-dollar bill into his hand.

"Dang ther change!" he cried. "Keep it ter blow off yer next mash."

"T'anks!" And in a nearly paralyzed condition, the waiter retreated.

"Help yershelves, mates," invited the liberal tar. "Drink deep!"

"Drink to the jolly dog
Who roams ther ragin' shee,
And alwus takes his grog
Wherever he may be."

The liquor was poured into the glasses, and one of the toughs said:

"Here's luck ter us."
There was a significance in the words which he fancied only his companion understood. Neither of them noted the significance in the sailor's saying:

"Here's luck ter me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LED INTO A TRAP.

BEN BARNACLE, as the somewhat "leery" sailor had given his name, seemed in a jolly mood. He was inclined to talk about himself and his voyages, and he entertained his "happen-by chance" companions for half an hour relating yarns of the sea. And, strangely enough, although he seemed to be drinking freely all the time, he did not appear to grow a whit more intoxicated than he was at first.

It must be confessed Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones waited with a great deal of anxiety for their companion to get "off de hooks," for then they could do their work with little chance of detection.

The two though would have been amazed had they known scarcely a drop of the whisky was swallowed by Barnacle. With the deftness of a professional magician, he conveyed the liquor to the sawdust-filled box which served as a spittoon, instead of allowing it to pass his lips.

Barnacle was not half so drunk as he appeared. He was playing a little game. In the course of his talk, he remarked:

"There ish one of my old mates in this city shomewhere that I'd like ter git on track of."

The thug who had called himself Smith thought it best to inquire who that was, by way of making some conversation.

"His name's Backstay—Jack Backstay," said the sailor, apparently looking into his half-emptied glass, but really watching his companions out of the corners of his eyes.

The thugs exchanged startled glances, and both manifested renewed interest.

"W'at's dat?" they inquired.

"Oh, he was a square mate!" declared Barnacle. "He was the right sort, you bet! He allush stood by me, an' I shed I'd stan' by him. He may be in trouble shumwhere here, fer he ish not booked for voyage. I'd like ter find him."

"W'at did ye say his name wuz?" asked Jones.

"Mebbe we knows him," said Smith.

"His name is Backstay—Jack Backstay," once more declared Barnacle.

Again the toughs looked at each other in a knowing manner.

"Dat soun's familiar," asserted Jones.

"It jest does," nodded Smith.

"Say."

"Well?"

"Dat's der title of der gent w'at's took der room round at our hotel."

"Der red-faced cove?"

"Sure."

"I t'ink you's right."

"I know I be, fer he told me dat was his name."

Ben Barnacle showed excitement. He slammed his fist down on the table with such violence that the glasses and the bottles danced.

"If you kin put me after my old shipmate, it'll be rocks fer you!" he declared. "What was he like?"

"Short," said Jones.

"Stout," added Smith.

"Red face."

"Rollin' walk."

"Reg'lar sea lingo."

"Been all over der worl'."

"Jolly good feller."

"That's him!" confidently exclaimed Barnacle.

"I'll bet my roll it's him!"

"Jest likely's not," nodded Smith.

"Can you take me ter him?" asked the sailor, who, to the amazement of the two thieves, seemed less intoxicated than at any other time since they had seen him.

"Of course we kin," was the reply, in unison.

"I'm goin' ter do ther right thing by you, if you do, mates," assured Barnacle. "I hain't seen him in near ten year, an' I'm jest dead to get hold of his fin."

"Den we'll take youse roun' ter der hotel," said Jones, with a cruel wink at his crooked companion.

The sailor arose.

"All right," he said, with an apparent attempt to be perfectly steady; "pilot me round there."

Two minutes later, the three ascended the stairs and left the cellar by an unlighted entrance. There were many significant looks cast after them as they departed.

Once out upon the street, to the surprise of the thugs, Barnacle insisted they should go ahead.

"I'm all ri'," was his assertion. "If we go cruising along tergether, some perliceman 'll think I'm drunk an' will be fer 'restin' me. Go 'head, I shav! I show I know how ter walk straight. Go 'head!"

They were forced to do so, and they little imagined the man at their heels was grasping a revolver as he followed them. If they had attempted to knock him over then it is pretty certain they would have been subjects for the coroner in a remarkably short space of time.

Ben Barnacle was playing a game with an object in view. He knew he might be wasting his time in allowing the thugs to guide him around, but from some things he had heard while he pretended to be asleep in the dive, he fancied not.

The toughs cut through the darkest streets and alleys, and seemed constantly on the outlook for some one. In fact, they did not desire to come under the especial notice of any policemen.

And Ben Barnacle knew this as well as they did.

They guided him to a wretched building, and, brave man though he was, he was inclined to hesitate about entering.

"This don't look like a hotel," he observed, as if he had just sense enough to discern the disreputable appearance of the building.

"Dis is a cheap lodgin'-house," assured one of his guides. "Der peoples w'ot stays here are poor but 'spectable, an' dat's on der dead level."

"An' poor old Jack has come ter this!" muttered Barnacle. "He never did hev much luck, but I owe him a mighty debt of gratitude, an' I'm goin' ter pay it. Lead ther way."

He followed them into the darkness of the stairway, and there he took the revolver from his pocket, in order to have it all ready for immediate use. But the two men went stumbling up ahead of him, after he had refused the assistance of one.

He followed them to a bare room that was lighted by a dirty oil lamp. There he sat down, at their invitation, having once more concealed his revolver.

Then Smith brought out liquor, and they all appeared to drink. Barnacle was obliged to turn the stuff down his sleeve.

He knew well enough the liquor had been drugged.

Immediately after pretending to drink, he produced his roll of bills.

"This ish last dollar I've got in worl'," he thickly declared, flinging it all down on the table. "Hain't got nozzor shent to my name; but if old Jack wants it all, he shall have it! Tha's wha's zer masher! I'm 'a—I'm a good-boy."

He began to talk with difficulty, and then complained of being sleepy. But he did not fall forward on the table in such a manner that he could be stabbed in the back. Instead of that, he tilted his chair into a corner and rested against the wall, his eyes apparently closed, but in reality open enough to enable him to watch the thugs through his lashes.

One hand was thrust into his pocket and grasped the ready revolver.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAN STEPS IN.

THE two thugs looked at each other and laughed.

"Well," said Smith, "dat was w'at I calls dead easy."

"Never struck any'ting fatter!" declared Jones.

Then they both made a leap and a grab for the roll of money that still lay on the table. Jones secured it.

"Looker here!" cried Smith. "No funny biz!"

"Ah! come off!" retorted Jones. "I know me place!"

"You needn't t'ink you's goin' ter swipe der holl of dat!"

"I'm goin' ter have me sheer!"

"An' I!"

"I reckon der biggest part of dis b'longs ter me."

"Well, I guess *not*! Dis is goin' ter be a even shake, or I'll make trub'! Ketch?"

Then they glared at each other, and there was a prospect of a fight.

"Say!"

"W'at?"

"Make a dead square divvy, or we'll fight it out!"

"Tell yer w'at I'll do."

"Well?"

"I'll take two-thirds of dis, an' give you der odder third wid der privilage of goin' t'rough der bloke."

"Mighty great privilege dat would be!"

"W'y not?"

"I got ears."

"Hey?"

"An' I heard him say dat bood' was der whole of his pile. No, yer don't work dat game on me! It's an even divvy, or fight fer der whole! Youse kin take yer choice, an' I wants yer ter take it suddint!"

"Then I s'pose it's divvy," said the other, reluctantly. "Not dat I keers any'ting fer fightin' youse, fer I'd be sure ter down yer; but I don't want ter lose such a pal as you has been ter me."

"It hain't no time fer us ter scrap anyhow. Der best t'ing we kin do is stick ter each odder clost. No matter who's der best man. We kin find dat out some odder time. Jest now we wants ter keep shady from der perlice."

"You bet dat's correc'! But der perlice hain't ser bad as dat Double-voice Dan. Dat man is der devil, an' I don't like him a little! If anybody noses us out, I reckon it'll be der private, not any of der reg'lers."

"Well, come on wid der divide."

The bills were spread out on the table and evenly divided with regard to the amount of money they were supposed to represent. The toughs were delighted, for the sum was above what they had expected.

"Dis is der slickest t'ing!" laughed Smith. "Why, we's flyin' high now!"

"Well, we is!"

"An' now we'd best go t'rough him, an' dem we'll have der nigger dump him in der street."

"Don't believe it'll pay ter go t'rough him."

"Well, we'll see."

But Barnacle did not care to be searched. Of a sudden, from an adjoining room—apparently—came a voice that called:

"Hello in there!"

The two thugs started.

"Who's dat?" they asked themselves, alarm expressed on their faces.

"Say, you in there," called the voice again.

"Who in blazes is dat?"

"You tell me!"

"Come, come!" called the voice again.

"Come in here. I want to see the both of you."

"If it's der perlice—"

"We'll fight!"

"Well, let's find out."

"I'm wid yer."

Then some ugly-looking knives appeared in the hands of the two thugs, and they crept cautiously across the floor, making scarcely a sound as they approached the door.

"Oh, say!" again cried the voice of the unknown, "don't be all night! Get a move on!"

Cautiously the men opened the door and peered out. They saw no one in the passage, and with one backward glance toward the man they believed drugged, they passed out and closed the door.

Barely was the door closed when a change came over Barnacle. His eyes flew open and something like a grim smile of satisfaction appeared on his face.

"This worked very well," he coolly observed, arising to his feet. "I am in here, and now to find what I *can* find. From what I overheard in the saloon, I am led to believe these two villainous wretches have Jack Backstay a prisoner somewhere. I wonder if it is in this old building? If he is here, I will do my best to find him."

"Much good may the money do those thugs! It was a very good Mott street counterfeit, but they'll get into trouble when they attempt to pass it. I had no particular desire to have them clawing me over so I tricked them."

The voice and manner of the man now betrayed the fact that he was Double-voice Dan, the detective, in disguise. He was taking desperate chances in his search for Jack Backstay.

Dan next extinguished the light. Then he crept across the floor and cautiously opened the door. Down the passage he heard the two thugs muttering in low tones.

Dan believed the sailor would be confined in the cellar or at the top of the house. As it was easier to reach the top, he went that way first, being able to do so without the two thugs knowing a thing of it.

"Smith" and "Jones" were Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson, but Dan did not wish to pull them just then. He knew it was possible one of the two men had killed Colonel Wayne, but there was a mystery about the serpent dagger, the old hag and the disappearance of Roving Jack, which he desired to solve.

The stairs creaked beneath his feet, but he kept steadily on till he reached the floor above. Then he began his inspection, knowing he was in the midst of a nest of thieves and law-breakers.

However, at that time of night, the birds of prey were all abroad, leaving their nest almost deserted. The women and children who remained were mostly sleeping.

Once or twice he was nearly discovered, but he finally found some stairs that led to the very top of the old building. It was very dark up there, and the place was not nearly as large as he had supposed it would be. This he discovered by feeling about.

Suddenly, from behind a tightly-closed door, came the sound of a voice that made Dan start. He pressed his ear to the door and listened.

"Say, wot's der use, boss, ter do up a little kid like me? How hev I ever run 'crost your grain? W'en yer cotched me, ye nearly choked der life outer me, an' now ye say you're goin' ter cut me t'roat. It hain't no fair shakel! Give me a knife an' I'll fight yer fer all I'm wort', but I don't care ter be tied up like dis an' hev me woozle opened."

It was Scrimpy's voice!

Dan immediately knew the boy was in deep trouble.

"You little devil!" growled another voice. "You was playin' ther spy! Don't deny it! It was you thet led ther detective to my other nest. Don't deny that! You're makin' trouble fer us, an' I'm goin' ter put ye out of ther way. Say yer prayers!"

"Say, hold on! Give me a little time! I don't want ter be snuffed out in such a rush; dat's wot's der matter wid me. You've got lots of time, so wait awhile 'fore yer cuts me t'roat."

"How long do you want me ter wait?"

"Oh, 'bout ninety-seven years! Dat'll give me plenty of time ter git all t'rough sayin' me prayers."

Dan discovered a place where a tiny ray of light shone out through a hole. To this hole he apphed his eye, and he was able to look into the room.

It was narrow and low, the interior being lighted by a small lamp. The light showed Scrimpy bound and sitting on an unsteady chair, his face pale but resolute. In front of him stood The Slasher in a half-crouching attitude, a wicked-looking knife in his hand.

But those two were not the only persons in the room. Tied to the floor in a distant corner was a man whom the detective fancied he recognized as Jack Backstay, although he happened to be in the shadow.

There was much that was devilish in the appearance of old Beazley Nuggins, and Dan felt sure the life of his boy assistant was in real danger. Still he waited to hear what Nuggins would say.

"I s'pose you call that a joke!" snarled the old man, flourishing the knife before the eyes of the boy. "Well, you won't be able to joke in a few minutes!"

"Dunno 'bout dat," was the retort. "I may be swappin' jokes wid St. Peter. I've heard tell der old feller likes a good joke. Say, s'pose youse tells me all you know 'fore youse do dis job. I'll be much obliged if yer will, an' I don't keer how much time yer takes tellin' dem."

"I hain't goin' ter waste any more time with ye! I'm goin' ter end ye now!"

"Say!"

"Well?"

"I t'ink you're real mean!"

Nuggins gave a snarl.

"Oh, you don't beg! You act as if you didn't fear me! Mebbe ye t'ink I hain't goin' ter cut yer woozle? Well, you'll find I do! I'm goin' ter do it now!"

The old man actually bent forward for the stroke.

At that moment the figure in the corner arose.

"Dash my toplights!" said the hollow voice of Jack Backstay. "This is murder—murder, I say!"

"Don't worry!" snarled Nuggins. "You'll come next! W'en Sal is done starvin' ye, I'll cut your throat!"

Detective Dan's hand had found the door, and, to his extreme delight, it opened before his touch, allowing him to step quietly into the room.

"You won't do anything of the kind, Slasher!" he declared.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ESCAPE BY THE ROOF.

THE reader may imagine the surprise Dan's entrance created.

The detective carefully closed the door behind him and placed his back against it.

Scrimpy gave a cry of delight.

Beazley Nuggins grated out a savage exclamation.

"I am interested in this throat-cutting," smiled Dan, who had removed the false beard from his face. "If anything of the kind is to go on, I am bound to be on hand."

"Curse ye!" snarled The Slasher.

"Oh, I know you do not love me any at all," said the cool ferret; "but I have a great affection for you, all the same—oh, a very great affection!"

Nuggins took a step toward Dan, crouching as if to spring, the wicked knife ready for use. But the detective lifted a warning hand.

"Don't try it, Slasher!" he cautioned. "It will not be well for your health."

His manner was perfectly cool, and, although he did not show a weapon, he caused the old crook to waver and pause.

"I'd like ter cut yer heart out!"

"I don't doubt it in the least. It is like you.

You were always cutting. But I do not think you will have the fun of extracting the main-spring of my system, as I have further use for that article. Just now, I want to inquire what this boy has done that you should think it the proper thing to cut his throat?"

"Done? Well, he has done enough! You know he's a spy—he's in with you! He'll git fixed!"

"Well, who is this other individual?"

"Dat's der sailor wot we're lookin' fer," quickly put in Scrimpy. "He's been shut up in dis hole, an' dat's why we hain't foun' him."

"Well, we have found him now."

"Much good may it do ye!" came from Nuggins. "I dunno how yer got in here, but I'll bet ye won't git out so easy."

"Don't bet, Slasher, or you will lose. Never gamble any at all, dear boy. Just now you will oblige me by dropping that knife."

Nuggins glared and growled, but still clung to the knife.

"Drop it!"

There was a ring in Dan's voice that was not to be mistaken. He meant business, and he took a step toward the old crook.

Clash! The knife rung as it fell to the floor.

"That shows your good sense, old boy," came from the cool detective's lips. "You have run up against me on one or two occasions, and so you know the kind of a man I am to deal with. I also know you pretty thoroughly."

"You'll never git out of this house!" declared Nuggins. "You're in a trap!"

"You can hug that delusion to your breast as much and as long as you choose, but Double-voice Dan never yet got into a trap he could not find a way out of. Lots of hard cases have done their level best to down him, but he is still on deck."

The old man shrunk back, but the detective fastened a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't you tetch me!" came shrilly from Nuggins's throat. "I'll holler!"

"If you do, I will wring your old neck!" sternly assured the ferret. "Have a care, for you know I always keep my word."

The Slasher knew Dan well enough to be cowed. The detective forced the old man back several steps, and then he picked up the knife and set Scrimpy free.

The boy capered with delight.

"By jolly, boss! youse didn't come 'roun' any too soon! I had begun ter reckon my goose was cooked. I was feelin' kinder blue in der region of der gills."

"All the same, you were keeping a remarkably stiff upper lip."

"I t'ought dat was de best t'ing ter do. I knowed it wasn't no use ter blubber."

"Scrimps, you are clean grit!"

"T'anks!" The gamin made a profound bow.

"Now," added Dan, "we must attend to our friend Backstay."

"Good for you, mate!" cried the sailor. "I have been tied down to ther main deck here till I'm weary for a change, shiver my timbers if I ain't! Just slip ther cable and let me loose."

Dan handed the knife to Scrimpy.

"Release him."

The gamin hastened to do so, while Dan kept watch of Beazley Nuggins.

A gasp of relief came from Backstay's lips as he arose to his feet; but he was scarcely able to stand at first.

"They've kept me on short feed," he explained; "and I don't feel any too gay. Howsumdever, I'll be stiddy on my pins after a bit."

"Now," said Dan, to Nuggins, "sit down in that chair."

"What for?"

"Never mind what for. Sit down!"

"I don't want ter."

"Sit down!"

The old crook no longer hesitated.

"Give me the ropes, Scrimps," ordered Dan.

Scrimpy handed them to him, and the detective began to tie Nuggins in the chair.

But at that moment, a confusion of sounds came from below. Dan paused and listened, then he said to Scrimpy:

"Open the door!"

The boy quickly did so. Then the sounds were more plainly heard.

"They have discovered I am missing from that room!" muttered Dan.

"Ha! ha!" laughed The Slasher. "You're trapped—you're in fer it! Ther hull house is roused! Ha! ha!"

"We must make a break!" said Dan, grasping the lamp. "Follow me!"

Through the open door he plunged, with the others at his heels.

Then Nuggins set up a fearful howling, which must be heard on the floors below.

"Hang that old wretch!" exclaimed the daring detective. "I ought to have fixed him so he would keep still, but it is too late now."

"How youse goin' ter git out, boss?" asked Scrimpy.

"Fight, of course!" put in Roving Jack.

"We're good for the crew below!"

"You may feel that way," said Dan; "but I believe discretion is sometimes the better part of valor. We will try the roof."

The light had showed him a flight of stairs that led to the roof.

At the same time they started for the stairs, Beazley Nuggins came out of the room behind them and began to yell:

"Here he is! This way! this way! Come on! The're takin' ter ther roof!"

Dan blew out the light and, in the darkness, he hurled the lamp at the old crook. There was a crash, the sound of a falling body, then a groan of pain.

"Perhaps that will keep his mouth still till we can get out on the roof," said the detective, as he hurried up the stairs.

But the old man's cries had been heard by Murphy, Gibson and their friends who had been aroused to hunt out the disappeared detective.

A light appeared on the stairs below, and Bark Murphy's voice rung through the building: "Come on! This way! He's up here!"

At the same time, Dan was vainly trying to open the skylight.

It would not stir!

Then came a crash of glass, as the desperate detective dashed it out.

"Through there lively!" he commanded, as he made way for his companions to get out. "Go on! Don't waste a second!"

Scrimpy scrambled out with the agility of a monkey, and the sailor was following.

Bark Murphy reached the head of the stairs, a lighted lamp in his hand. But the light was not sufficient to show him a man who stood on the steps just under the skylight.

That man had something in his hand—something that glittered.

Crack! It was the report of a revolver, and it was followed by a crashing of glass and a cry of mingled pain and amazement.

A bullet from Detective Dan's revolver had shattered the lamp in the hand of the tough.

But that did not stop the desperate men.

"They be gittin' out on der roof! Come on! come on!"

By this time Roving Jack had reached the roof, and Dan lost no time in following the sailor.

Murphy, Gibson and several others were at his very heels when he reached the roof.

But Scrimpy was at his side, and in the gamin's hand was a loose brick he had taken from the nearest chimney.

"Jest keep back, boss!" he whispered. "Let me git a crack at der fu'st cokernut dat comes up t'rough dat winder! Oh, I'll make it sore!"

So Dan drew back and waited, his revolver ready for use.

Murphy was the one who thrust his head up through the broken sky-light, and the gamin promptly hit him with the brick. It happened that Gibson was close behind his partner, and when Murphy fell, he took the other tough along.

They struck at the bottom of the steps with a terrific crash.

"Ki-wow!" laughed the gamin. "If I didn't crack dat cove's shell, I'll bet he won't wear his reg'ler hat fer a week. His head will be too large to fit der tile."

"Now we are up here," said Backstay, "how are we goin' ter git down? This is the fu'st time I was ever aloft an' didn't know how ter git down."

"We must get on another roof and descend by means of the skylight," said Dan. "It will be impossible to get down through this thugs' nest."

They discussed the situation a few moments, speaking cautiously so they would not be overheard by those below. All the while, Dan closely watched the skylight, ready to make the first individual retreat who showed his head.

It was soon decided that Dan should watch by the skylight while Scrimpy sought a way to get down. The sailors also followed the gamin to the nearest roof, though the leap was a trifle perilous.

As he crouched by the skylight, Dan could hear the excited words of the gang from whom they had escaped, and he made out that Murphy had been knocked senseless and possibly killed. Dan felt that Scrimpy would have done a good job for the city, should it prove that the thug's skull was really cracked.

At length a low whistle from the daring lad reached the detective's ears, and he knew Scrimpy had found a way to get into the next house.

Dan paused to call to those below:

"Hello, down there!"

There was no reply, but the voices were hushed.

"Hello!" repeated Dan. "Why don't you come up and see us? We have lots of the same kind of medicine in store for you all. Just shove up your heads and get them thumped. It is what you need and will do you good."

"Wait till we gits our claws on you!" flung back Gibson.

"I can't waste my time in waiting so long," was Dan's answer. "You will have to excuse me, for you are asking too much."

After this, he remained silent till they began to talk again, and then he crept softly away and leaped to the neighboring roof, where his companions were waiting for him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SAME CURSED KNIFE!

THE trio had little difficulty in getting down into the next house, which they did before any of their pursuers dared thrust a head through the broken skylight.

Scrimpy led the way down the stairs, seeming to have the eyes of an owl. Luckily, no one seemed astir in the building, and they reached the front door without being discovered.

Scrimpy's fingers threw back the bolt, and a look into the street showed them it was deserted.

They lost no time in getting out, and then Dan notified the first policeman they met that he could make an important capture by going through a certain house.

But the detective did not wait to see the result of any raid that was made, for he felt convinced Jack Backstay would have much of interest to reveal, and he was anxious to listen to the sailor.

"Well, I feels better," declared Scrimpy, when Dan's office was reached. "Dere was one time w'en I t'ought me time was up. I don't keer ter be in dat place again, bet yer last plunk!"

"How did you happen to be in such a scrape?" asked Dan.

The gamin explained how he had shadowed Rodney Wayne and what he had discovered. Dan was greatly interested. Then the boy told how Old Sal had come out of the room at the door of which Rodney parted from the beautiful girl. In his peculiar manner he told of following the old woman and how she tricked him.

"Der old gal jest swapped rigs wid Nuggins, or su'thin' of dat sort. She prob'ly saw dat I was follerin', an' she took dat way ter fool me."

"Arter old Beazley choked me till I didn't know northin' he sacked me up inter dat room an' tied me in ther chair. W'en I kem round, dere I was. His nibs here was wid me, an' we had a tork. I told him how we was lookin' fer him, an' he said he'd been deprived of his freedom for some time."

"Well, old Nuggins didn't show up till a short time 'fore you happened along. W'en he did come, he was ragin', an' he did mean ter wipe me clean out. Boss, I don't fergit dat youse was on hand ter save me from havin' me t'roat split."

"And I have not forgot how you saved me from being done up. It is only square, Scrimps."

Then Dan asked Jack Backstay for his story.

"Mate," said the sailor, "I could talk better if I had something inside my ribs."

"You are hungry?"

"Hungry! Well, that hain't ther name fer it! I've been livin' on bread an' water an' hope fer some days, an' I hain't had much of elther."

"It's a bad hour to find anything to eat," explained Dan; "but I guess Scrimps will be equal to the emergency."

Then he gave his boy assistant some money and told him to rustle around and find something to eat.

While the boy was out, the sailor told his story, which was as follows:

"Ther youngker has told me you was ther Spanish chap as I struck in the dance hall. My remembrance of that is kinder mixed, mate, but I believe I told yer 'bout Inez, ther Spanish gal as I brought from Cuby?"

"You did."

"Well, I thought she was dead, out it is hard to kill one of Satan's imps! She hain't dead."

"No?"

"Not at all. You 'member ther old woman as showed up in ther hall—ther old hag?"

"Yes."

"That's Inez."

"You are sure of this?"

"I be. There hain't a shadder of doubt 'bout it. Inez didn't die, but she has lived ter become a creature as fiendish as she once was beautiful. Keel-haul me if she wasn't beautiful in them old days, messmate! But she had ther devil in her, an' it was boun' ter come out."

"I got a rap on ther head there in that hall, an' it mighty near made me crazy. I dunno how I managed ter steer out of ther place, but I done so. Then I was laid out for two whole days with a head that felt like it was bu'sted. I imagined all kinds of horrible things 'bout ther old hag I had seen, an' her eyes kept hauntin' me all ther time. Wherever I'd look in ther room where I was I'd see them eyes."

"Arter a while, I riz an' steered fer ther street. I wanted some grog, an' I wanted it bad. Well, I got it, an' at ther same time I got inter some trouble with a crew as tried to sail over me. Then I was thumped ag'in'."

"Again?"

"Yes—knocked senseless, mate. When I came round, I was in that room where you foun' me. There was two toughs as was set to keep watch over me, an' they declined ter answer my questions. When I raved, they threatened ter cut my throat."

"Oh, it was jolly, mate—very jolly! I hain't goin' ter drag it out by tellin' all I had ter go through, but ther worst was when ther old hag come an' squat at my side an' taunted me an' tole me she was Inez—Inez, the beautiful!"

"At first I did not believe her, but she convinced me. She tole me things that showed me she was really ther Inez I had knowed many years before. She tole me how she hated me

an' meant to slowly and gradually starve me to death. She was goin' ter keep me along on bread an' water for a time, an' keep reducin' the amount all ther while. Oh, the foul fiend was in her!"

"That old woman would come an' crouch over me an' jabber by ther hour. Sometimes she'd beat me with her fists. There didn't northin' but hatred seem ter have a chance in her heart. It was no use to try ter talk with her, she wouldn't listen to reason."

"The old man never came but once besides ter-day—yesterday, I mean—an' ter-night. I dunno northin' 'bout him."

"It was mighty fortornate fer me that you found us there. But fer that, I callate ther hag'd done fer me. Arter this, you may bet I'll steer clear of her first, last an' all ther time. I hain't no love fer her, an' she loves me jest as hard."

Dan questioned the old sailor, and while he was doing so, Scrimpy returned with some bread and cakes he had managed to obtain.

With the greed of a starving man, the sailor grasped and began to devour the food. He was really in a famishing condition.

Dan watched Jack for a time, and then he questioned Scrimpy, who minutely described all that had befallen him.

"I know something was the matter with Rodney Wayne," said the detective. "This explains in a measure his singular actions of late."

"But what connection can there be between Old Sal and the beautiful young girl with which Wayne has become enamored?"

Dan thought it over for some time, and he finally decided the girl must be the old hag's daughter.

"If that is true, she will be pretty sure to visit her child again. If she does so, she must be taken into custody and forced to explain certain things which puzzle me."

When Jack Backstay had appeased his hunger by devouring every eatable article Scrimpy had brought in, he announced that he was ready to answer any other questions the Always-on-Deck Detective might wish to ask him.

"Look here," said Dan, "I suppose you are grateful toward me for saving you from the old hag!"

"I'd be a dog if I wasn't, mate!"

"Then I want you to show it by serving me."

"In any way I kin."

"Good! I have a fancy this Inez—or Old Sal, as she is now known—is in some way connected with the death of Colonel Andrew Wayne, of which you may have heard."

"I have heard of it, an' I thought it might be so. I know her!"

"Did you ever tell anybody Colonel Wayne had a rival—a Cuban?"

"Never, mate."

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"That shows how straight the newspapers get stories in some cases! You were probably speaking of Inez and connected her with the murder. A reporter overheard some of your talk, and he twisted it into a very romantic yarn that claimed the colonel was killed by a man who had been his rival in other days."

"You remember telling me of the strange dagger with which Inez tried to kill you?"

"Ay, sir."

"Look at that!"

Dan suddenly produced the dagger with which Colonel Wayne had been murdered, and thrust the blade into Jack's hands.

With a cry, the sailor dropped the weapon on the desk and started to his feet, staring at it as if he saw a spirit.

"That is the same cursed knife!" he gasped.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER OLD SAL.

THE following day Scrimpy was set to watch the door of the room in which Rodney Wayne had visited Luona, while Dan shadowed the young man.

The detective was careful to secure a warrant that would enable him to search Luona's rooms. Armed with this, he fancied himself ready for any emergency.

Scrimpy did his duty faithfully, but his patience was sorely taxed. From ten in the forenoon till six-thirty, in the evening he watched without any result and without anything to eat.

"Feel as holler as a base-drum," he muttered, crouching in a corner, having obtained entrance to the building an hour before. "I hain't no Doctor Tanner, or any odder prize faster. It hain't fun ter feel yer backbone w'en yer puts a hand on yer stumjack!"

But he was soon to be rewarded for his vigilance. He heard a step on the stairs, and drew further back into the shadows of the niche.

Old Sal was the person who came up the stairs. Her face was covered by a veil till she reached the door, but there she lifted it so the boy caught a fair look at her features.

From her pocket the old woman produced a bunch of keys, with one of which she unlocked the door.

When the door had closed behind the old woman, the gamin detective danced with delight.

"Great hokey!" he cautiously exclaimed. "Der old gal's in der hole! If Dan was only here now, we'd git our fins on her. I dunno w'at he t'inks, but he seems to want ter ketch Old Sal mighty bad. Well, I'll jest watch fer der old gal, an' if she takes a skip 'fore he gits round, I'll do me level best at follerin' her ag'in. Dey hain't goin' ter skeer dis kid out of der game by makin' a shake at cuttin' his woozle. I'm a sticker, I am! It'll take der Old Boy hisself ter skeer me off der scent. Feller's gotter have grit ter be a detective, dat's w'ot!"

If that was the greatest requirement for success, Scrimpy was well qualified.

Another hour passed and still the boy watched the door. No one had come out since Old Sal entered the room.

Then the boy heard the door open and close below, and some one came up the stairs.

It was Rodney Wayne, and his step was light and buoyant. He rapped on the door beyond which Old Sal had vanished.

Scrimpy feared the young man would see him, and he remained perfectly motionless.

But Rodney had no thought of inspecting his surroundings. His only desire seemed to be to greet the person he expected would meet him at the door.

After the knock, there were a few moments of silence, followed by the moving of a bolt on the inner side of the door, which directly swung open.

A vision of loveliness was disclosed.

Luona was there in evening attire. The corsage of her dress was low-cut, and her snowy flesh gleamed through the delicate lace that lay above her heaving bosom. Her arms were unconcealed, being perfect in their contour and of ivory whiteness. On her bosom blazed a blood-red rose. Its twin was in her dark hair. Her cheeks were crimson with blushes, and her eyes glowing with allurements.

She held out her hands to him.

"Rodney!"

"My darling!"

He caught his breath, as he grasped her hands. In another moment he had kissed her. Then she drew him gently into the room, and the door closed behind them.

"Oh, hokey jee!" gasped Scrimpy, punching his head with his own clinched fist. "Oh, hully goozle! Oh, gummany jimcracks! Dat's der kind of a female w'at I calls a double-barreled stunner! She jest takes der prize squash, an' dat's der matter wid Hannah! I never saw der equal of dat so long as I've been runnin' wid der best s'ciarty! If she's dat old hag's gal, it's jest a plumb wonder!"

The boy had lots to think about, but he was not given much time for thought.

He heard a cautious footstep on the carpeted stairs, and then another person came slowly up.

"Well, how did dat git strayed in here?" Scrimpy asked himself, as he fell far back into the corner. W'at it—some French count frum der nearest barber shop?"

The man had the dress and manner of a foreigner. Both his mustache and imperial were waxed to a fine point. He carried a cane.

This person paused at the head of the stairs and looked around. Then the gamin heard him mutter:

"The fellow surely came in here. I wonder which room is occupied by this girl who has roped him into her net? Scrimpy should be watching in this vicinity."

The gamin nearly fainted.

"Dat's der boss!" he gasped. Then he arose and kicked his left leg with his right foot.

"St!"

The boy shadow made himself visible.

"I'm right on der spot, boss; but I didn't know yer. You has so menmy shifts dat it boddors a feller."

Dan muttered a low exclamation of delight, as he saw his assistant.

"Good enough!" he said. "Did you spot Wayne?"

"Sure."

"Where is he?"

"In dis room. Whisper soft or dey'll hear us."

"This is the strange girl's room?"

"Yep."

"She admitted him?"

"She did."

"Well, I don't know as there is anything to be done."

"Oh, yes dere is!"

"What?"

"Der old gal's in dere."

"The old girl?"

"Yep."

"Old Sal?"

"You've named her."

The detective exhibited his interest.

"You are sure of this?"

"Dead sure, boss."

"You saw her go in?"

"Dat's w'at."

"How long ago?"

"Bout an hour."

"And she has not come out since?"

"Nary."

"Then we'll grab her. Keep your eyes wide open and stay right here."

"Where's you goin'?"

"For a couple policemen. I have the search-warrant."

Dan hastily descended the stairs, while Scrimpy remained on guard.

In a short time the detective returned, two policemen being with him.

Being directed to the door, the officers rapped loudly. There was no immediate reply, and they rapped again. Then the door was cautiously opened as far as a chain would permit, and the face of Luona appeared at the aperture.

"What is wanted?" she asked, paling somewhat as she saw the two officers.

"We regret being obliged to disturb you, miss," bowed the politest of the policemen; "but it is our duty to search your rooms."

An exclamation of anger broke from the girl's lips.

"Search my rooms, sir?" she cried. "What for?"

"We have reasons to believe we shall find a certain person for whom we are looking."

"Person—what person?"

"An old woman."

Luona started back.

"There is no old woman here!"

Dan stepped forward, removing his hat and bowing.

"Pardon, mademoiselle! Eet is true she do come here—you do not deny zat? Oh, no! She do come! *Oui, oui!* I know eet. She come a short time ago—she was seen. She have nevere go out since zen. She must be in zere now."

His appearance was that of a genuine Frenchman.

"I tell you there is no woman here besides myself!" cried the girl. "The only other person in these rooms is a gentleman friend. I have no desire to admit you. What do you want of this old woman, anyway?"

"Oh, she do take somezing—perhaps eet be by mistake. Eet belong to me, mademoiselle. I do complain to ze police. So we be here, where she have been seen to come. We have ze warrant for ze search. You cannot prevent zat. We will nevere do ze least harm, so you need have no fear at all."

Then Rodney Wayne appeared.

"This is an outrage!" he declared. "Must this young lady submit to such a thing? Of course she does not want you going through her rooms!"

"We will disturb nothing," said the leader of the policemen. "But it is necessary for us to make the search. A complaint has been made, and there is no other course to pursue. I trust you will not make it more unpleasant for us than it really is. I assure you we have no taste for it."

Rodney glared at Dan, whom he did not recognize, and the detective smiled on the young man in a most aggravating manner.

Scrimpy kept in the background.

"Will you show your warrant?"

The officer did so.

"It is all right," Rodney was forced to confess; "but that does not make the outrage any less." Then he fell back and spoke with Luona.

"I can keep them out for a time," he said; "but they have a warrant, and are bound to come in, sooner or later. The best thing is to submit quietly."

She was convinced, and the chain was removed from the door, allowing the detective and policemen to enter. Rodney immediately stepped in front of Dan, saying:

"The officers have the right to search, but you, sir, will not be permitted to go nosing over the place."

Dan assumed an attitude of offended dignity.

"Monsieur," he said, stiffly, "I am a man of honaire. I have been rob. All I ask is justaice. I do not suppose you mean zat mannaire for to insult me?"

"It would be impossible to insult you!" was the hot and contemptuous retort. "You are beneath insult!"

Dan saw the young man was spoiling for trouble.

"Is zat ze way you look at it? Wen, no bettaire can I expect from Americans. They do rob and then insult! *Mon Dieu!* I have to stan' eet I suppose." Shrugging his shoulders in a resigned manner.

The detective had requested the officers to make a thorough search, and he fancied they would be certain to bring forth the old woman.

"Why didn't you stay in your own country?" came fiercely from beneath Rodney's mustache. "It is certain you are not wanted over here!"

Dan had taken pains to survey the beautiful Luona, and, to himself, he confessed the girl was bewilderingly attractive. He began to understand how it was the young man had been led to prove false to his golden-haired sweetheart. The dark-eyed maiden had bewitched him.

"Will monsieur be kind enough to let ze mattaire drop," requested the disguised detective.

"I will let it drop till we meet next!" was the low but savage retort. "Will you kindly give me your address?"

"No."

"You refuse?"

"I do."

"Coward!"

Dan was touched.

"Monsieur, you call me zat! Eef in France, I would call you out. Now I will say zat I nevere was coward enough to prove false to ze one zat do love me—I nevere throw her ovare for annozare."

Rodney fell back, as if struck in the face.

"Who the deuce are you?" he hoarsely demanded.

At this moment, the two policemen came out of an adjoining room and announced their search for the old woman as unsuccessful.

Like a flash, Dan removed the false mustache and imperial, at the same time dropping his French manner.

"I am Double-voice Dan," he said, in answer to Rodney's question. Then, turning to the policemen:

"The woman is here somewhere! I will not be satisfied till I have investigated myself!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

BAFFLED SEARCHERS.

OF course Rodney Wayne was astounded. He had little thought the man to whom he was talking was the detective.

Scrimpy had kept in the background while the rooms were being searched, but Dan had so much confidence in his youthful assistant that he still believed the old hag was concealed about the place somewhere.

When the detective threw off his disguise and announced his determination to search the rooms, Rodney was so taken aback that he made no objection.

As for Luona, she was reclining in an easy chair, apparently quite indifferent to what was taking place.

Dan kept his word and searched the rooms, looking into every corner or closet that could conceal a person. He found everything in the most perfect order and all the furnishings were elegant and expensive. The occupant of those rooms was apparently one who could command no small amount of "filthy lucre."

But Dan was no more successful than the officers in discovering the old woman for whom he was looking. If Old Sal had entered there, Dan decided she had found some way of leaving without Scrimpy's knowledge. Just how she did so was not plain, for the only way to leave the rooms seemed to be by the hall in which the boy had remained constantly on the watch.

Dan really felt somewhat crestfallen when he was forced to give over the search.

Then—not till then—Luona again showed more than passing interest. She arose to her feet and came forward. Her step was stately, her manner haughty, her whole appearance that of an injured queen.

"I trust you are satisfied?" she said, her eyes sparkling and the red blood burning hotly in her fair cheeks. "You have trespassed in my private chamber, to which no one but myself is ever admitted! You forced me to submit to your insulting demand, and I was helpless to resist! Oh, but I do not forget! *Madre de Dios!* A Cordova never forgets!"

She was in a passion, and at that moment she scarcely knew what words passed her lips. But Dan heard those final words, and he gave an involuntary start.

"A Cordova never forgets!"

They rung in his head. "Cordova" was the word he had found on the hilt of the serpent dagger with which Colonel Andrew Wayne had been killed! It was also the name of the beautiful Inez who had escaped from Cuba as a stow-away and lived in this country with Jack Backstay!

These things passed like a flash through the detective's brain, and he once more looked searchingly at the beautiful girl.

She was Spanish; there was no doubt about that. And a Cordova! Despite the fact that Old Sal had not been found in those rooms, Dan did not doubt but Scrimpy had seen the hag enter there. If the repellent old creature was the once beautiful Spanish girl, then it was quite probable Luona was her daughter.

Like an enraged tigress, the girl paced the room. Again she paused and burst into a torrent of passion, her pose that of one whom anger had driven quite beside herself. And now one-half her words were in Spanish. Dan could understand little that was said, but he was almost spellbound by her manner.

The policemen hastened to escape from her wrath, and the detective thought he had better follow.

But, as he was leaving, Rodney again stepped in front of him. The young man's face was pale, and his manner showed he was intensely aroused.

"Sir," he said, with forced calmness, "I shall require your services no longer. You may present your bill in the morning."

Dan saw it was useless to attempt reasoning with him, so he simply bowed. Then Rodney stepped aside, and the detective followed the policemen from the room, the door being promptly closed behind him.

Scrimpy caught hold of Dan the moment the detective appeared.

"W'at's dis?" cried the gamin. "One of dem hamfatter cops tole me I'd best go fall on

meself an' take youse 'long wid me! W'at am der tr'ub'? Didn't youse find der old gal? Oh, say! w'at is it?"

"Old Sal wasn't in there, Scrimps."

"Come off! W'at yer givin' us! I saw dat prize chromo go in dere, an' she hain't come out. In dere! 'Course she is! I know she is!"

"I assure you, you are in error this time, Scrimps. I went all through the place, and she was not there."

"She was hid."

"I would have found her."

The street Arab was aghast.

"Well, I jest don't understan' dis!" he said, soberly. "Wisht I'd went in dere, stead of stayin' here an' watchin' der door, I t'ought somebody might try ter take a sneak, so I laid low right here."

"Which was right."

"Say, boss."

"What?"

"You don't t'ink I was leery?"

"Of course not, Scrimps."

"Well, I'm glad of dat, fer I was all right. I saw her go in dere."

"And you didn't fall asleep afterward?"

"Nary sleep."

"Then she got out by a way of which we know nothing. Come, Scrimps." And Dan led the way down stairs.

But Scrimps did not leave the building. When they reached the foot of the stairs, Dan softly said:

"Go back, Scrimps—go back softly! Lay low and watch for the old woman."

The boy nodded. Dan went out upon the street, and his youthful assistant stole back up the stairs, making not a sound.

When the detective and the police officers had disappeared, Luona paced the room in something like a perfect frenzy of rage. Rodney watched her with a feeling of awe, but his regard for her was in no way diminished by the display of passion. Instead of that, he fancied he had never before seen her look so captivating.

He stole softly to her side.

"Luona!"

She turned on him like a flash, her face dark and stormy. Then she saw who it was, and the shadows slowly cleared till the radiant sunshine of her smile burst through.

She held out her hands.

"Rodney!"

He caught her fingers and kissed them; then he held her close in his arms once more.

"My God, Luona!" he said, hoarsely; "you cannot know how beautiful you are! You are ravishing—distracting! And never have you seemed more so than when angry!"

"You are a foolish boy," she declared, with mock reproof. "You tell me I am beautiful so often that—"

"I tell you—how can I help it? I cannot but speak the truth! You are queenly!"

He tried to kiss her, but she placed her hand over his mouth.

"Not now," came soberly from her lips. "Wait. I have something to say to you. Come to this divan, Rodney."

She led him to it, and when he was seated, she sunk on a hassock at his feet, turning those bewitching eyes upward toward his face. The unobtrusive pose of both would have made a subject for an artist.

"Rodney," came slowly from her lips, from which the smile had quite faded, "you have told me how much you love me, and—"

"I tell you again, my darling—again and again! I love you more than life, honor, everything else! You are so dear to me that it would be impossible to live without you!"

"I like the sound of your words. You are a knightly man, and to win such love as yours is the greatest of fortunes! I love you, Rodney—love you very dearly! But I fear—I fear!"

"What?"

"You know how much I have asked of you—you know my past is a sealed book. I have not given you the privilege of looking into it."

"I do not ask it, Luona."

"You are generous, my king—too generous! But I fancy I can see into the future further than you—I can see a time when your love will not be as it is now."

"Then the vision is a deception! My love will never change toward you!"

"How happy I would be were I sure of that! But, Rodney, what if you knew—what if you knew?" She started to her feet, a look of horror on her beautiful face. "What if you saw me before you a hideous and wrinkled old woman—bent, tottering, repellent! Ah, what if you saw me thus, instead of what I am at this moment? Would your love remain the same? No, no, no! You would not take me in your arms—you would never call me your darling again! Never more would I feel your kisses on my lips. Never—never more! You would turn from me in disgust—in loathing! You would leave me to die from the loss of your love! And I would die, cursing myself—cursing God!"

Her manner was so wild and strange that it filled him with astonishment and dismay. He knew not what to think. When he opened his lips to speak, she cried out again:

"I had a thousand times rather you would kill me now! I had rather die at this moment! Then I would not change—then I would be beautiful in death! I must not wait till the last change comes—I must die while I still appear young and beautiful! Then they will never know—never know! But in death I will not feel your kisses, my king—never again! never again!"

The words were wrung in agony from her heart. She staggered toward a couch, on which she flung herself face downward, her beautiful figure quivering with emotion.

Rodney sprang up and hastened to her. He bent over her, crying:

"Luona—Luona, my darling! What wild fancies have filled your brain? Look up! I am here! The time shall never come when you will lose my love—such a thing is impossible! Do not sob so! It tears my heart to hear you, my precious! I cannot bear it! Why should you look far ahead to the time when you will be old? That will be many, many years. Then I shall be young no longer. We will grow old together, my beautiful! In those happy years to come my love can never diminish!"

He was on his knees at her side, his arms about her. She slowly ceased to sob and turned her face toward him. His kisses fell like rain on her lips—her red, red lips! But still he fancied there was a lingering look of terror in her midnight eyes.

Was it because she still saw some horrid ghost of her other self as it hovered over them

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOMETHING SINGULAR.

It was a long time before Rodney could reassure her so that she once more seemed like her natural self. He was filled with wonder at her strange manner, and the only explanation that occurred to him was that she felt a great horror of growing old. He knew the fear of old age made the lives of many beautiful women miserable.

"You should not think of such things now, darling," he declared. "All the best days of youth are before you, and old age is a long distance off."

A shudder ran over her, and she murmured:

"I suppose so, but you cannot know the horror I have of being old and hideous."

"You may become old, Luona, but so beautiful a creature can never become hideous?"

"Oh, you do not know!"

"I think I do."

"You do not—thank God!"

He saw she was growing wild again, and he did his best to quiet her. He succeeded, but she clung to him, as if she feared that hideous ghost would thrust them apart.

"Luona, when are we to be married?"

He put the question direct, and she started back.

"Married!" she gasped—"married! Never—never!"

The words astounded him.

"Never?"

"No, no, no! It cannot be!"

He caught her hands and looked deep into her eyes.

"It must be—it *shall* be!" he declared.

"Oh, no, no!"

"For God's sake! what do you mean?"

"Oh, I cannot explain! Why will you ask me?"

"You love me, Luona?"

"You know I do—you know it!"

"And refuse to become my wife?"

"Yes, yes! I can never be that!"

A deep shadow settled on his face, and, quite unconsciously, he gripped her fingers so fiercely that she uttered a cry of pain.

"You confess your love for me and still refuse to become my wife!" came hoarsely from his lips. "Do you know what you are saying? If you really mean that, it must be you are playing with me! You cannot really love me!"

"I do, Rodney—I swear I do! I love you more than everything else! You should not doubt me! How can you doubt me? Have I not shown you plainly that I really and truly love you? How wild you look! Your eyes frighten me!"

"I beg your pardon," he entreated, with forced calmness. "I did not mean to frighten you. But you do not know how deep your words have cut me. Luona, you do not know all I have sacrificed for your sake!"

"You have made a sacrifice for my sake?"

"Yes. Listen; I feel that I must tell you. You shall know how dear you are to me and how much I am ready to give up for you."

"In this city there is a fair-haired girl to whom I am pledged. I asked her to become my wife before I ever saw you, and she gave her pure young heart into my keeping. Listen! For your sake I have proven false to her!"

"And you loved her once?"

"I thought so; but it was not such love as you have aroused in my breast."

She resolutely released her hands and arose to her feet. She faced him firmly.

"Rodney, you have done wrong!"

"I care not for that!" he wildly declared. "I love you, Luona—you, alone!"

"You have done wrong," she repeated. "I have feared something like this would rise between us. You have pledged yourself to this other, and you must be faithful."

"It is impossible!"

"Say not so! You must never let her know of your faithlessness; you must marry her."

He laughed, but there was naught of merriment in the sound.

"It is too late now."

"Too late?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"She knows all. I have kept the secret as long as it was possible, for I knew how it would tear her young heart. But I have cursed myself for doing so! This very day I wrote a letter to her."

"That letter—"

"Explained everything. I was not easy with myself. I told her how guilty I felt, but I had learned I did not really love her. I told her I had learned to love another, and I asked to be released from the engagement."

A cry came from Luona's lips, and she turned from him. He was at her side in an instant.

"You see, Luona—you must understand now? I have given up all for you!"

"You have done wrong!"

"Do not talk to me of that!" with a desperate gesture. "Wrong or right, it was for your sake! Have I not told you how much dearer than my honor you are to me?"

"And have I not told you there is a secret I can never reveal to you?"

"What care I for that?"

"Would you marry a woman with a secret?"

"If that woman were you, yes!"

"Oh, Rodney! your love is indeed great! I would I were worthy of it!"

He clasped her in his arms once more.

"Worthy, my darling! You are worthy of more than my love! Worthy! Could any creature be more worthy? You are strange tonight; I do not understand you."

"You never will!"

There was a sob of despair in her voice.

"But I will try. Only you must become my own—my wife! You cannot refuse! Why should you? I have this day removed the barrier by writing and mailing that letter."

"There is another barrier of which you know nothing."

For an instant an unpleasant feeling crept over him and he thought of the scene he had witnessed in the Park. He had saved this peerless creature's life and she had confessed she loved him: still she said she could not become his wife. A horrible suspicion assailed him, and, for an instant, he fancied he understood what barrier still stood between them. He thrust her off at arm's length and looked fairly into her face.

"There is another—a husband?" he fiercely cried.

At first she did not seem to comprehend his meaning. The moment she did so, she cried:

"No, no, no! There is no other—no husband!"

"Do you speak the truth?"

"Rodney!"

"Forgive me, darling! I must be mad! How could I doubt your truthfulness when your eyes—your glorious eyes!—look so frankly into mine! But what—"

She checked him.

"Hush! Remember you have promised not to question me."

He was mute.

"Come," she said, after a time, "let's go out somewhere. It seems so close and oppressive in here."

She gasped for breath, as if the air was really close and stifling.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"Anywhere."

She secured a heavy wrap that completely enveloped her figure, and he noticed she took a veil, though she did not bring it into use.

They went out together, and he found a carriage near the door. He directed the driver to take them to the Garden Theater, where a new opera had just opened. Now that he had broken with Iva, he cared not who saw him with the girl he loved.

He was able to secure good seats, though a box was not obtainable. But almost the first person on whom his eyes rested was Rupert Delmar. Iva's brother was staring at Rodney as if unable to believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Satan will be to pay now!" thought Rodney. "Rupert will feel like shooting me. Well, I care not."

But, for some reason, he did not enjoy the opera. He was aware that the beautiful girl at his side was the cynosure of scores of eyes, and his bosom swelled with pride; still a strange unrest possessed him.

Suddenly, just after the curtain arose for the final act, Luona touched his hand with hers. He started, for her fingers were cold as ice.

"Let's go!" she whispered, and there was much that was strange about her manner.

"Quick, Rodney!"

She was trembling. He looked into her face and saw her color had fled. Her cheeks were

pale and her lips almost blue. There was a look of fear in her eyes, and her face looked strangely old and drawn. In a moment, she had lost much of her ravishing beauty.

"Something has frightened her!" he thought.

They immediately arose and left the house, Luona adjusting the wrap about herself as they passed toward the exit. At the door he turned to speak to her, and he was amazed to discover she had hidden her face with the veil.

The carriage was called and he assisted her into it. She spoke no word. Somehow, after he had entered and sat beside her, a feeling came over him that it was not Luona at all. The feeling was an uncanny one, and he tried to talk, so that it would be banished; but she only replied in a murmur that did not seem at all like the voice of the girl he loved. There was something harsh and unpleasant about it, and Luona's voice was like soft music.

The uncanny feeling grew upon him, and, instead of being attracted toward his companion, he suddenly realized he was possessed by a feeling of repulsion. He grew silent, and remained thus till her door was reached.

Then, before he could descend to assist her out, she left the carriage and hastened toward the door. He was struck by the figure, although it was concealed by the flowing wrap, and he sat for a moment like one turned to stone.

"God!" he muttered. "Is that Luona?"

Then he sprang from the carriage to follow, but she passed beyond the door, closing it in his face.

Like one dazed, he turned back to pay the driver. That worthy was grinning in a knowing manner.

"She seemed a little shy, sir," he said, as he accepted the money. "They act that way sometimes. Better luck next time, sir."

With an exclamation of rage, Rodney raised his clenched fist, as if to strike the man in the face.

"You infernal cur!" he grated.

But he did not strike. His better judgment prevented, and his hand dropped by his side. Then he turned and walked away.

The driver chuckled, as he gazed after the young man.

"Well, he was hot! I don't blame him either, for she gave him the dead shake."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A DREAM.

LIKE one dazed, Rodney wandered along the streets. He did not seem to notice any one. His head was bowed at times and his steps slow; at other times he would throw his head back and forge along swiftly. But he took no notice of the direction he was pursuing.

Chance led him to his own door, and he let himself in with his key.

As has been stated, Rodney was very temperate for a city-bred youth, but something impelled him to drink this night. He found a decanter of whisky and took a pull at it. The amount he swallowed would have intoxicated him at any other occasion, but he scarcely seemed to notice it now.

Up to his room he went.

The first thing he noticed on touching the electric button that gave him a light was a letter lying on his little writing-table.

In a moment he had it in his hand.

It was his letter to Iva!

He had forgotten to mail it!

Little wonder Rupert Delmar had gazed at him in astonishment and wonder on seeing him at the theater with another than Rupert's pretty sister.

Pretty?

Yes, Rodney confessed she *was* pretty; but he told himself it was babyish beauty compared with that of the ravishing Luona.

Iva was like a costly waxen doll; Luona was like the dark-eyed queen of some tropic land.

He paced the room. From an ivory and gold-ornamented case he selected a cigar and lighted it. Then he continued walking the floor, the case still in his hand. After a long time he noticed it was there.

Then he stopped and looked at it. It was a delicate and costly little thing.

Iva!

It made him think of her. It was like her.

It had been her present to him.

With a fierce exclamation, he hurled it savagely on the carpet.

The shock was too great for so delicate a thing to endure, and it lay broken at his feet.

He stood looking down upon it. For a long time he stood thus, as if fascinated by the sight of the broken case. He allowed the cigar in his mouth to go out.

At length, with a bitter sigh, he stooped and picked up the pieces. With the tenderness of a woman, he pressed them to his lips.

"You remind me of her—of Iva!" he murmured. "As I looked down at you, I seemed to see her, like a beautiful doll, lying broken at my feet. Poor girl! I trust she did not care much for me! I hope she will easily forget it all! I know I have not used her right; but what could I do—what could I do?"

He placed the broken case in a drawer, and then he began pacing the floor once more. For

an hour he walked restlessly up and down, gnawing the unlighted cigar.

Finally he flung up his arms with a strangling gesture, gasping for breath.

"How close it is!"

He opened the windows wide and looked out into the street.

A few pedestrians were moving along below. A carriage rolled softly along the asphalt and a fragment of a laugh came up to him.

He turned away, heavy-hearted.

"What right has any one to laugh?" he grated.

"What right has any one to be happy when I am so miserable?"

Miserable?

Till that moment he had not known he was miserable. Now he stopped and wondered *why* he was miserable.

"I ought to be happy, but for some reason I do not seem to feel that way. There is a pain in my heart—a pain I am not able to understand."

Up and down the room again. Then he flung the raggedly chewed cigar from the window and sought another.

But he was careful not to open the drawer where lay the broken cigar-case. He did not wish to see that again that night. He took the cigar from a box of expensive weeds, and daintily clipped the end with the cutter on his little smoking stand. Lighting this cigar, he continued his restless pacing of the floor.

This time he did not allow the cigar to go out. Instead of that, he pulled at it so fiercely that there was a large glowing mass of fire at the end, and it actually seemed to threaten springing into a blaze.

His brow was knotted in a scowl and his handsome face was slightly forbidding just then.

When the cigar was smoked, he dropped it in a cuspidore, and then extracted from some secret nook a photograph. With the picture in his hand, he threw himself down in an easy-chair, his position being such that the light would fall full upon the pictured face.

It was Iva's!

The photograph was a fine one, and still it did not flatter the original. That was simply impossible! As he sat there gazing at the picture, his face gradually relaxed. Finally, as with the broken case, he pressed it to his lips.

"Well," he sighed, "it is now all over between us. We are no longer anything to each other. The only thing I regret is that it was necessary for me to cause you a pang. My regard for you has made me a coward too long, for I should have sent that letter several days ago. I shrunk from it, knowing well it would hurt your poor little heart. But there can be no longer delay. I will send it promptly in the morning. Good-by, little Iva!—good-by! When next we meet, it will be as simple friends—or, perhaps, as strangers!"

"I must return all her presents. I had forgotten that. In the morning I will see to it."

He returned the picture to its place, securing another cigar. After obtaining a light, he lay back in the chair, his feet unconsciously elevated on another, and meditated while he smoked.

He was troubled, for he could not understand the strange actions of Luona. Why had she fled from him, closing the door in his face? No matter how many times he asked himself the question, the answer always seemed unattainable.

"She must explain that!" came from his lips. "She cannot refuse! If she does—But she will not!"

"There is one thing strangely mysterious about her—something I am unable to understand. I know not but that makes her all the more fascinating to me. What is her secret into which I must never question? Ah! that is one of the mysterious things! Why should she have a secret? Who can tell?"

"Sometimes the shadow of a doubt will arise, but I crush it down. I will not entertain a doubt! Doubts would rob me of her love, and nothing on earth shall do that! I love her for what she is now, and the past—though it be black as midnight—shall remain buried! We will look to the future for happiness."

"But why did she act so strangely when I spoke of our marriage? Ah! here rise those fiendish doubts again! Down, down! I will not believe it was because of any great sin on her part! I will only believe that it was on account of some unexplainable whim."

"She loves me! I know it—I have seen it in her eyes! She loves me more than all others in the world. Perhaps, at some past time, she has fancied she loved another! Perhaps—perhaps she is—bound—to—another!"

"God!"

He was on his feet again, and he madly paced the floor, the thought having fired his brain.

Bound to another! No, no, no! it could not be! And yet—and yet—

The more he thought of it, the more possible such a thing seemed. She had been entangled in some kind of law business, and possibly it was for the purpose of getting free from this "other." Perhaps the lawyer had secured a "separation," but not a divorce.

The thought was maddening. Another—had another possessed her? Ah! even though that were true, Rodney would not give her up!

Though she had been a wife, he loved her still! If that other still stood between them—

"He had better take good care to keep clear of me! Let him never cross my path! I do not want his blood on my hands, and Heaven only knows what my anger might lead me to do! I scarcely have control of myself now."

After a time he became calmer. He began to think of the strange feeling that came over him after he entered the cab with Luona, as they were returning from the theater. What had caused it?

He could not tell. All he knew was that, instead of being attracted to her whom he loved, he had been grasped by a feeling of aversion—of repulsion. He had unconsciously drawn from her, as if she were some wretched thing that would contaminate him, instead of the queen of beauty who set his pulses throbbing when he looked upon her.

Why had she drawn that veil over her face and kept it there so closely?

He studied over the question for a time, and then a sudden thought struck him.

Possibly the one to whom she was bound and the one whom she feared was there. Possibly she saw him in the audience, and that explained the change that so suddenly came over her. She had immediately hidden her face and asked to return home. That seemed reasonable.

But when she had so suddenly left the carriage at the door and hastened along across the walk, there had been something unnatural about her figure. True, it was enveloped by the flowing garment, but for all of that, he had fancied he saw something unnatural in its appearance. It was not straight and upright like that of the beautiful Luona he knew; and the walk was not that of a young girl in whose veins bounded the warm blood of perfect health.

The ashes fell from his cigar and made a dash of white on his dark coat. He drew forth a silk handkerchief and brushed them away. Then he looked at his cigar and discovered he had allowed it to go out. Feeling in his pocket, he found a dainty match-safe, from which he drew forth a match.

Then he lighted the cigar once more and smoked it to a stub that burned his fingers before he reluctantly dropped it into the cuspidore.

He glanced at a tiny clock on a bracket.

It was three in the morning.

He was not sleepy, and he was astonished to discover so much time had slipped by since he entered the house.

Rodney at once arose and undressed, determined to obtain some sleep, if possible.

But there was not to be much slumber for him. What he did obtain was filled with horrible dreams.

At times he would dream of Luona, and then it would be of Iva. The dream that impressed him the most was of the former. He fancied a horrible giant was dragging her away to a dark dungeon. She screamed—she turned her beautiful face toward him—she held out her fair round arms. He must save her! But when he tried to pursue the giant, something held him motionless. He raved and cursed, and finally the chain was broken. Then he pursued and overtook the monster at the very mouth of the dungeon.

A fearful battle ensued. It seemed as if he must be overpowered by the giant, but the thought that he was battling for Luona gave him the strength of a Samson. With clasped hands, she was watching the terrible contest, praying he might be the victor.

At length Rodney seemed to get his hands on the monster's throat, and, slowly, but surely, he strangled the creature to death. Finally it lay limp and lifeless in his arms, and then—horror! it was no giant at all! It was—

Iva!

Astonished, appalled, horrified, he gazed down on the lifeless face of the one he had murdered. She was sweet and fair as a lily.

Then he heard a laugh—a harsh and cruel laugh!

He looked toward Luona! It was she who had laughed! And as he looked the beautiful face changed—changed till it became old, haggard, fiendish! The dark eyes glowed with the fire of madness, and the figure was bent and bowed. A mass of disheveled white hair fell over the face, but he saw enough to give him a shock that woke him from his dream.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RODNEY AND RUPERT.

WHEN Rodney came down to breakfast in the morning, his face was pale and his eyes sunken. He usually looked bright and fresh in the morning, and had a springy step, but he did not look rested this morning, and his step was slow and heavy. Once more he resorted to a drink of liquor.

Rodney was not able to eat much breakfast, but he succeeded in forcing down a few mouthfuls.

He had determined to call on Luona at an early hour, casting aside formality for once, but he decided the hour was too early just then, and he returned to his room.

He had not been there long before a servant appeared and announced there was a gentleman in the parlor to see him.

"Did he send up a card?"

"No."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Rupert Wayne."

"The devil!"

Rodney was on his feet instantly.

"Tell him to come up."

He knew what was coming. They had been firm friends for a long time, but now their friendship was to be shattered. He nerved himself for the meeting.

Soon came a determined knock on the door.

"Come in."

Rupert entered.

Rodney did not offer his hand, for he did not wish to be humiliated by a refusal to touch it.

Rupert's face was dark and stern.

"Good-morning, Rupert," bowed Rodney.

"I haven't noticed whether it is or not," was the short retort.

Rodney elevated his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.

"Have a seat."

"Thank you; I do not care to sit down."

"You must be in a hurry?"

"I am. I have come to ask you for an explanation."

"An explanation?"

"Exactly."

"Of what?"

"Oh, confound it! you know well enough! You know I saw you last evening!"

"Yes, I know that."

Rodney was cool to the verge of iciness, while Rupert was plainly boiling with passion.

"Well, don't you think that requires an explanation?"

"Perhaps so."

"I am here to listen to one."

"Did it not occur to you I might decline to explain—"

"Decline to explain—"

"To you?"

"I have always taken you for a gentleman!"

"Thank you."

Rodney produced a box of cigars and offered them to Rupert, but Iva's brother declined with a passionate gesture. Rodney calmly selected one, clipped the point and lighted it. Rupert watched every move, and his anger increased with each passing moment.

"If I have not been mistaken in estimating your character," said Rupert, doing his best to restrain himself, "you will not decline to explain. If you do—"

"What?"

"We will speak of that later."

Rodney picked up the letter written to Iva.

"My explanation is here," he said. "I intended your sister should have received this yesterday."

Rupert started.

"Yesterday?"

"Yes."

"But I only saw you last evening. Yesterday no explanation could have been required. I do not understand this!"

"You will understand it in due time."

"Due time is the present time. We have been firm friends in the past, and, if you can explain, you should do so now. You must understand my position. Iva is my sister; you have asked her to marry you. Very naturally, I might expect to see her at your side at the theater, but I saw another there—a stranger."

"Did you not recognize the stranger?"

"Recognize her—no! I saw she was beautiful after a fashion, and—"

But Rodney turned with the first display of passion.

"After a fashion! What do you mean by that? Man, she is beautiful as the angels!—she is queenly!"

Rupert fell back a step, grasping at the back of a chair.

"This from your lips!" he almost grated.

"I do not like it! Man, what can you mean?"

Once more Rodney was cool and collected.

"Must there be a scene? Very well; let it come. What do I mean? Simply that I love her, Rupert."

Iva's brother crouched as if to spring at the other. Rodney leaned against the corner of the mantel and blew six perfect rings of smoke, each following one passing through the first to appear.

"You tell me this—tell it to my face?"

"You should know me well enough to know I never tell a thing behind a person's back. I would not dare say to his face, if it were necessary."

"And you mean it?"

"Most assuredly. I asked you if you did not recognize my companion?"

"I did not."

"You have seen her before."

"When?"

"At the fire on Sixth avenue."

"No?"

"Yes. She was the girl for whom I imperiled my life."

"And I helped the firemen drag you both from the flames!"

"You did."

"I think it would have been better had we allowed you to cook!"

Rupert was in deadly earnest. Rodney saw that and understood the feelings of the other.

"Perhaps you are right," he confessed. "I have even thought as much."

The reply staggered Rupert for an instant, but he swiftly recovered.

"Do you mean to throw Iva over for this—this—other?"

"I mean to ask your sister to release me—that is all."

A harsh laugh came from Rupert's lips.

"And I thought you a gentleman!" he cried.

"I see my mistake now! You are a cad and a fool! That is what I think of you!"

Rodney deliberately flicked a bit of ashes from his cigar.

"That is plain enough. I am willing to acknowledge I fancied you would think so. But that does not change the situation in the least. I have discovered I do not love your sister and that I do love this other girl. What would you have me do? Would you have me hold to the engagement with Iva and marry her while my heart was set on another? I do not think you are simple enough to wish such a thing."

"Wish it! Great Scott! I would not have you marry her under any circumstances now! I have found you out, and I see you are not fit for her!"

Rodney bowed.

"I fear you are in a measure right, Rupert," he acknowledged. "That is what I have told myself. I could see but one course to pursue. I do regret that I have not made the situation clear to Iva before this, but I have hesitated about causing her so much as a pang of disappointment. I know Iva cares for me, and I feel like a brute for allowing another to win my affections from her. But what is cannot be remedied."

For the moment Rupert was at a loss what to say. His blood was boiling and he longed to do something, but it seemed impossible to quarrel with a person who so distinctly condemned himself.

"I understand your feelings," declared Rodney, "and I do not blame you in the least."

"Satan take it!" cried Rupert. "I want you to blame me! If you would only get mad—do something—anything! If dueling were in vogue, I'd call you out and shoot you through the heart!"

"And make a big scandal by doing so. It is not necessary to create so much talk."

"Isn't it? Well, you must have strange ideas of what will create talk! You and Iva have been publicly announced as engaged, but last evening you were seen at the theater with another girl. Pretty soon it will come out that everything between you and Iva is at an end. Oh, that will not produce talk! Oh, no!"

"And what have you cast her over for? Do you know the kind of a girl you rescued from the flames on Sixth avenue? I fancy not. She has deceived you. But I know what she must be—what she is."

"Stop, Rupert—for heaven's sake!" cried Rodney, his face growing dark. "Remember you are in my house! I will not listen to a word against her, even though I know it is your unreasoning anger that prompts it!"

Rupert suddenly turned toward the door.

"I am in your house I remember. Very well; my lips are sealed for the present. But we shall meet again."

A moment later, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

At the signal from Dan, Scrimpy returned up the stairs and remained on guard. For the time, he had forgotten his hunger. He was angered and chagrined by the failure of the officers to find Old Sal.

"Der old gal's in dere, an' dat's w'at's der matter!" he grimly muttered. "I seen her go in, an' I hain't seen her come out. She's dere, but she managed ter hide frum der boss an' der cops. Oh, she's cute, dat's w'at's der matter!"

He crouched down in the corner and thought over the situation for a long time. He had a wiser head than one would expect to find on such shoulders and he decided there was a mystery about the matter that was not easily explained.

"But I's goin' ter camp right on de turf till I gits a idee," he asserted. "W'en I gits a idee, den I'll know w'at ter do nex'."

"Hully gee! Hain't I hungry! Fergot all 'bout dat. I'll hev ter grin an' stick it out. I'm goin' ter find out if dat old gal is cooped in dere, if I hev ter play Doctor Tanner."

But, after a time, an idea entered the gamin's head, and he stole down to the door. There he peered out through the glass and, at the same time, listened for any sound from above.

In a short time he saw a companion passing, a lad with whom he had once been in partnership in the paper business. In a moment he opened the door and thrust his head out.

"Hey, Chimme!" he called.

Jimmie looked around.

"Dis way," cried Scrimpy. "Tumble up here an' let me git me eye on yer, old man. I want ter warble a word in yer ear."

Jimmie stood and stared at Scrimpy in amazement.

"Who be youse?" he asked.

"Oh, say, take a fall ter yerself! Don't yer know me? W'y, I's yer old pard Scrimpy Stubbs."

"Hickery Dicks!" exclaimed the other. "Be youse Scrimpy? W'y, so yer be! Where did you find all dat styie? My, my, my! Looker der togs! Gimme a beer 'fore I fain't!"

He advanced and surveyed Scrimpy with wonder and admiration. But the young amateur detective promptly caught him by the arm and drew him inside the door.

"Now, keep cool an' talk 'way down in double p," advised Scrimpy. "I want youse ter do me a turn."

"W'at kind?"

"I want youse ter git me some crullers ur suthin' at de nighest bakery. I'm plum nigh starved, an' dat's w'at's der matter wid youn truly."

"W'y don't youse git 'em yerself?"

"Ah, now, don't ax too menny questions. I can't stop. Biz is mighty pressing, an' I can't 'ford ter waste time. Say. Here's a dime. Now I want youse ter git dem crullers—all dat'll bring—an' fetch 'em here lively. Will yer do it?"

Jimmie looked greedily at the dime.

"Yep," he said, and then he made a grab for the money.

Scrimpy promptly caught his former partner by the collar, at the same time placing his clinched hand, containing the money, behind his back.

"Aw! now ye don't!" he cried. "I know youse! You want ter swipe the shiner. Now looker here, Jimmie, be you goin' ter do der white t'ing by me?"

"'Course!" protested Jimmie, somewhat sheepishly.

"Well, I want ye ter understand dat I want dem crullers heap wuss dan I want dis money. I'm dead nigh starved. Now if youse skip wid dis ten cents, you ain't goin' ter git so much as you would if yer brought me der crullers."

"How is dat?"

"See dis quarter?" and the gamin held up a silver quarter of a dollar.

"Well, I's got eyes!"

"All squee. Now, if youse fetches me dem crullers I'll give youse dat quarter."

"Honest?"

"Honest Injun."

"Dis hain't no brace?"

"Nary brace."

"Gimme der dime an' I'll hev der crullers here in less dan two shakes."

Without another word, Scrimpy forked over the dime and let Jimmie out. The ragged gamin promptly dusted round the nearest corner.

Scrimpy had some doubts about ever seeing his former partner turn up with the crullers, but he was happily disappointed. Jimmie came back with them and claimed the quarter, which he received, according to agreement.

Then Scrimpy went up stairs to his nook, where he counted the crullers.

He made a discovery.

There were only eight of them.

"Der blamed t'ief!" whispered the disgusted gamin. He stole three cents. Anybody kin git eight crullers fer seven cents, an' I give him ten. Well, wait till I see dat feller der next time!"

He ate every one of the crullers, and he felt as if he could have finished as many more. But those were enough to brace him up wonderfully.

Scrimpy's patience was tireless. He was on guard when Rodney and Luona left the rooms together, and still he remained where he could watch the door. The hall light did not reach him in his handy nook.

Right there he stopped through all the long hours that followed. People entered and left the building, but none of them entered or left the rooms he was watching—that is, he saw none of them do so. Fortunately he was not discovered.

At length a figure that attracted his attention came laboring up the stairs. The time was between ten and eleven.

Scrimpy started and looked sharply at the figure. It seemed somewhat familiar to him, but a long flowing outer garment and a veil over the face prevented him from inspecting it as he would have done.

Straight to the door of Luona's rooms hurried the person, and from beneath the flowing garment came the rattle of keys.

At the same moment, a harsh voice muttered: "Ah-ha! A narrow escape! a narrow escape!"

He almost uttered an exclamation of wonder, for the voice was like that of Old Sal!

Out from beneath the flowing garment came a gloved hand that held the jingling keys. But what attracted Scrimpy's attention was the arm to which the hand was attached.

It was thin, bony and scragged, like that of an aged person!

The gloved hand shook, but, after a time, succeeded in fitting a key into the lock and opening the door. Then the figure tottered into the room and the door closed behind her.

For a while Scrimpy was too paralyzed to stir or utter a sound, but he finally regained control of his faculties.

"Sizzlin' dingbats!" he gasped. "If dat wasn't Old Sal I don't know northin! Dat's who it were! But how did she git on der outside? Wow! Dat question's a reg'ler biff right on me t'inker! I can't answer it. De only 'splanation dat I kin see is dat dere is some odder way fer ter git in an' out dem rooms. If dat is so, w'at's der good of me watchin' here?"

He thought it all over for a long time, and he finally decided he was wasting valuable moments.

"Better he snoozin'. Dere surely is some odder way of gittin' in an' out dat place, an' dat's w'hy dey didn't ketch Old Sal. But now der young gal is out and der old gal is in. I jest wish Dan was on der ground."

In a few minutes he descended to the door, having decided it was best to give up the watch and get some sleep. What was his amazement to come upon Double-voice Dan and Roving Jack at the very door.

Dan explained to Scrimpy that he had brought the sailor round to see the girl Luona, whom he had described to the old tar.

"Well, youse won't see her," asserted the gamin.

"Why not?" asked Dan, in surprise.

"'Cause she's out."

"Out?"

"Yep; went out wid der feller wot's fergot his fader was murdered."

"And they have not returned?"

"Nary return; but der old woman's up dere now."

"The old woman?"

"Old Sal."

"What? Are you sure?"

"Dead sure. I didn't see her go out, but I saw her go in not more'n twenty minutes ago."

Then the boy briefly told all about it, while Dan listened closely.

"There is a mystery here that I cannot understand," positively declared the detective. "I know of not a single way that old woman could have eluded us. However, if she is there now, I will try to rake her in. Come on."

Luckily, they had struck Scrimpy at the very door, so they were able to enter the building without arousing any one. They did so softly, but Roving Jack held back.

"You can go ahead, my hearty," said he, generously, to Dan. "I have no desire to fall into the fins of that she-devil, mate. She don't love me a great heap, and she would stick a knife between my ribs as quick as not."

Up the stairs they went, and Dan rapped on the door.

There was no answer.

After waiting a long time, he rapped again, slightly louder than before.

Still the knock failed to arouse any one.

"She is laying low," whispered the detective. "I am sorry, for we cannot force an entrance. We shall be baffled again."

However, he knocked for the third time.

Then there came a soft rustle of garments from behind the door, and a soft, musical voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"A person who wishes to see you but a moment," was the detective's reply.

It seemed as if the one within hesitated, and then decided to open the door. This she did suddenly, and the trio found themselves face to face with—

Luona!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PERPLEXING PUZZLE.

"HULLY gee!"

The exclamation came from Scrimpy's lips. Had a spirit appeared at the door, the gamin could not have been more astounded.

Double-voice Dan was also astonished.

But the most astounded of the three was Roving Jack. The sailor fell back a step, his hands uplifted, and a single word coming from his lips:

"Inez!"

Luona heard the name, and, like a flash, her eyes were turned on the speaker. The color faded from her face for an instant, and she recoiled a step, making a motion as if to close the door.

But Dan did not want the door closed just then, and his foot prevented it.

"One moment," he entreated.

Then he heard a strange sound. It came from Jack Backstay's lips, and a glance showed the sailor wildly clutching at his throat and gasping for breath. He seemed to be strangling.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded the astonished detective.

Roving Jack lifted his arm, and one finger pointed straight at the girl.

"It is her!" he cried—"it is Inez! I know her—I know her! See! She knows me! Look—her face has turned pale! It is the same—the same! She is beautiful—beautiful! She hain't changed in all ther years! She hain't growed old a bit!"

"What is this?" almost angrily asked the detective. "What in the world are you trying to get through you? I do not understand!"

"Nor do I, mate! She should be old; but she's jest as young an' beautiful as ever! She's not changed even a little bit!"

"The man is mad!" came with difficulty from Luona's lips. "Have you brought a maniac here? Allow me to close the door, sirs!"

"In a little. But you seem to know this man?"

"I never saw him before in all my life," was the unsteady reply.

"But you paled at sight of him."

"Who would not? His actions were strange enough to frighten any one who did not possess iron nerves. He looked like a wild man! What can you want of me?"

"I am informed the old woman for whom I searched is still concealed in your rooms?"

"It is not true!"

"No?"

"No, sir!"

"But my informant declares he saw her come in here."

"Then he told an untruth."

"You give me your word to that effect?"

"I swear there is no woman in these rooms besides myself! Is not that enough, or must I again submit to the humiliation of a search?"

"I will accept your word."

She bowed.

"Thank you."

But Dan was not ready to allow her to close the door.

"I have one or two questions to ask."

A cloud fell on her beautiful face, to which the color was slowly stealing back.

"Well, pray be quick about it. I am weary and about to retire."

"Are you Spanish?"

Again she fell back a bit, and then bit her lip.

"What right have you to ask me such a question?" she suddenly demanded, her manner haughty and spirited. "Am I on trial? It is impudent and insulting."

"I assure you I mean no insult."

"But the question certainly is insulting. Whose business is it whether I am Spanish, French or English? Not any one's but myself!"

"Do you decline to answer?"

"I do, sir!"

Dan smiled, easily.

"Very well. I regret very much that my duty compels me to trouble you with such questions, but there is certainly no way I can force you to answer them. I have one more."

"Did you ever know an Inez Cordova?"

Again the color vanished from her face, and the white hand that she lifted to her bosom shook like a leaf in a strong breeze. She clasped the side of the door for support, her eyes being filled with a look of terror. Her lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

Dan was watching her closely, and a feeling of triumph filled his breast.

"That shot struck dead center!" he told himself.

The girl seemed to understand how she was betraying herself, and she regained her composure as soon as it was possible to do so.

"Inez Cordova?" she repeated, as soon as she could speak. "No, I never heard of such a person."

"You are sure?"

She threw her head back haughtily.

"I am positive."

"Very well," smiled Dan. "Those are all the questions I have to ask, but—"

"Then I will bid you good-night."

With a sudden move, she thrust his foot aside and closed the door in their faces.

"Hoopee!" snickered Scrimpy. "Dat's de settlement of dat!"

Dan scowled a bit and then laughed.

"The door is closed, and we are on the wrong side," he calmly said. "All there is for us is to retire as gracefully as possible."

Jack Backstay had not a word to say, and the trio descended the stairs and went out on the street. As soon as the walk was reached, the sailor seemed inclined to talk, but Dan prevented him.

"Wait till we get to the office," he said. "Come along, Scrimps. You have been on duty for a long stretch, and you must need some sleep."

They took a car and were soon at the office.

"Now," said Dan, turning to Jack, when they were all seated, "I am interested to know what you have to say about it."

"Well, mate, I'll be eternally keel-hauled if I know what to say!"

"You seemed to recognize the girl."

"I thought I did."

"But have changed your mind?"

"I don't say that."

"What, then?"

"Well, I've bin thinkin' it over."

"With what result?"

"None that's saterfactory, that's a fact. It's queer—mighty queer!"

"What is?"

"About that gal. Now I do sw'ar she looks exactly like Inez looked year an' year ago!"

"So much that you thought at first it was Inez?"

"Right you are, my hearty! I was clean knocked on my beam's end, an' thar I lay wobblin' in ther wind. Why, it took all my breath away!"

"She seemed to recognize you, too."

"Dat's w'at she did," put in Scrimpy.

"I thought so," acknowledged Jack.

"Something singular about that," said Dan.

"Mighty sing'ler, mate!"

"Did Inez Cordova have a picture of you?"

"Nary picter."

"Then she could not have recognized you from a likeness she had seen."

"No."

"It is a puzzle."

Jack arose to his feet.

"Mate," he said, soberly, "w'en she opened that door an' I saw her thar, I cal'lated I was face ter face with ther old Inez! It clean knocked me in a heap, an' I didn't stop ter reason any then. 'Fore I knowed it, I bollerred out her name. She give me that one look, an' then I didn't know but she'd kerflummix. She seemed as much broken up as I did, an' that is queer."

"You believe Old Sal to be the original Inez?"

"Yes."

"Then this must be her daughter."

"I s'pose so."

"There is no other way to explain it. That makes clear the relation between the two."

"She denied bein' Spanish."

"No; she simply denied knowing an Inez Cordova. She refused to say if she was Spanish or not."

Jack nodded.

"That is true. I remember now. But thar hain't nary doubt 'bout it—she's got Spanish blood in her veins. Ther eyes, cheeks, chin, nose, mouth—all were exactly like them of ther old Inez I knowed."

"She has determined to protect Old Sal."

Scrimpy struck in:

"Say, boss!"

"Well?"

"Be I a chump?"

"I guess not."

"I guess yes!"

"Why?"

"Well, I told youse der gal was out."

"You did."

"I seen her go out wid dat feller."

"Young Wayne?"

"Yep."

"And you did not see them come back?"

"Nary see."

"Well, you remember you decided there was some other way for a person to get in and out of those rooms. You saw Old Sal go in?"

"Yep."

"You are sure? Did you see her face?"

"Nope."

"Hal! How was that?"

"Der old gal had it all kivered wid a veil. But I saw her arm, all bare an' skinny; an' I heerd her mutterin' somet'ing. I knowed it was her."

"You might have been mistaken."

"Nary time!"

"You are positive about it? How was she dressed?"

"Oh, I dunno. She had on some kind of a long thing that kivered her all over—a kind of a shemale Johnny Bull top coat."

"And you did not see the figure beneath this?"

"Not a glimp'. All der same, I'll swear it was Old Sal. She was all humped over like, same as der old woman is."

There was a scowl on Dan's face and his manner was perplexed.

"It is a strange and most baffling affair," he said, speaking more to himself than the others. "I almost believe I would strike the trail that would solve the whole mystery if I could only get this first tangle straightened out. I will go to the bottom of it, if it takes a lifetime!"

"But you're off der job now, boss," put in Scrimpy.

"How is that?"

"W'y, der feller's gived you yer walkin'-pape's—discharged yer."

"Well, I think we will stick right close to the case, just the same," Scrimps, nodded the Always-on-Deck Detective.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MURPHY AND GIBSON EXPLAIN.

DOUBLE-VOICE DAN puzzled over the matter for hours, and he finally decided to watch the girl himself. He believed in that way he would be able to get his hands on Old Sal, and he had come to think of the hag as having had a hand in the murder of Andrew Wayne.

But, the very next day, he was delighted to

hear that the two thugs known as Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson had been captured by the police. He immediately set out to visit them.

He found them in a cell, and they were not particularly delighted to see him.

"Well, I s'pose youse got us inter dis scrape?" growled Murphy.

"That is where you are mistaken," replied Dan. "You brought yourselves into it."

"Now don't give us any of that kind of talk! We don't like it!"

"Not any!"

"Well, you are liable to get a great deal that you will not like before you are at liberty again."

The thugs growled at this.

"We'll know who ter go for w'en we do git out."

"There is not much chance you will ever get out."

"Hey?"

They looked at each other and then at Dan in genuine or well-simulated surprise.

"W'ot yer means by dat?"

"You may have ter set in the Death Chair," They paled.

"W'y, we didn't kill der duffer!" both cried, in chorus.

"Didn't?"

"No!"

"But he is dead."

"Dead! Is dat so? W'en did he croak?"

"Now that is a strange question for you to ask. He was dead two minutes after you left him."

Again the thugs exchanged looks of astonishment, and then Murphy cried:

"Now, w'ot yer givin' us! We knows better dan dat! We only hit him a little tunk, an' der papers hain't so much as had a word in dem 'bout it. If he'd been dead, we'd seen it in der papers."

"I don't know what you call a little tunk, but these little tunks sometimes are fatal."

Both the thugs grinned.

"Say," spoke Murphy; "w'at yer tryin' ter work us fer?"

"The best thing for yourselves."

"W'ot's dat?"

"A clean confession of the murder."

"Oh, go fall on yerself! We h'a'n't done no murder, an' so we don't make no blow. See?"

Dan scarcely thought the two rascals were the actual perpetrators of the crime, but he believed in making them think he was of that opinion; but, of a sudden, it dawned on him that he was speaking of one thing and they of another. They had declared there was nothing about it in the papers, and surely there had been enough concerning Colonel Wayne's death in the papers.

"You say you hit him a little tunk. Where was he when you did this?"

"In der darkest spot jest round der corner. We're reddy ter give up his watch an' money if he don't rub us too hard."

"You took his watch and money?"

"We allus git w'ot we goes arter. See?"

Now Dan was sure it was not Wayne they were speaking of.

"Look here, my men," came grimly from the detective's lips, "I fancy there is a bigger charge hanging over you than you dream of. You are really under arrest for the murder of Colonel Wayne."

Both thugs looked astounded and frightened. They uttered exclamations of wonder.

"Say," came from Gibson's lips, after a brief silence, "is dat der straight t'ing?"

"It is."

"But we never had no han' in dat!"

"Can you prove it?"

"We kin try. We don't know nuthin' 'bout it!"

"Sure?"

"I'm givin' yer talk on der dead level."

"But why have you dodged the police and been so shy?"

"Why, 'cause of der odder job. Der old bloke put der police on, but kept it out of der papers some way."

"And you fancied I was after you for this other job?"

"Sure."

"Well, you were mistaken. I am on the Wayne case."

"Den you're foolin' away your time wid us."

"I don't know about that. Who was this person you slugged?"

"Oh, he's one of der high cocks of der town! He was on a big booze. If he pulls us over, we'll tell in court jest how drunk he was."

"You sand-bagged him?"

"A little easy."

"And went through his pockets?"

"Cert."

"You say you will take oath you know nothing about the Wayne affair?"

"Course we will!"

"Do you know Old Sal was in some way connected with that business?"

"Nope."

"What do you know about her, anyway?"

"Not much, only dat she's der devil!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, everybody's 'fraid of der old sarnip. She's mad, I guess."

"You guarded a prisoner for her—the one I helped to escape?"

"Well, she paid us. She said he was her husband, an' dat he had deserted her."

"So you thought you would take a hand in readjusting the family difficulty. Very kind and thoughtful of you!"

Dan continued to question the thugs till he learned all they knew about the old woman. He obtained much information under promise to do what he could for them in the sandbagging case. He felt safe in this, for he fancied the man who had been robbed by them had not made a complaint to the police, being ashamed because he was intoxicated. It afterward developed he was right in that respect, the unfortunate being a highly respected citizen, who had a horror of being dragged into court in any manner, and was willing to lose his watch and money rather than take the stand against the thugs.

Of course the detective was not sure the two rascals were telling him the truth. He knew them too well to rely implicitly on their word. But they had certainly appeared truthful, and very much in earnest. If they lied, he felt that their lies were most ingenious.

In order to confirm their story, he set out to find the man who had been sandbagged. Neither of the thugs would tell his name, although Dan tried to convince them they might as well do so after telling as much as they had. But the shrewdest criminals are often unreasonable and foolish. If they were not, they would not be criminals. A wise man never commits a crime, no matter what the inducements may be. The moment a man commits one crime he has taken the first step on the downward path, and there is but one reward in store for him—retribution and remorse!

Dan found the citizen who had been sandbagged, and heard his story in full. By this the detective learned that the deed had been done at about the hour Colonel Wayne was killed. What he learned caused him to decide the two men had not fabricated in one respect.

Then Dan felt that his last hold was on Old Sal. The old woman, he believed, could tell who killed Colonel Wayne.

But how was he to get his hands on a woman who could vanish so readily as Old Sal seemed able to do?

That was a question hard to solve.

In disguise, he set about shadowing the girl known as Luona. He now firmly believed she was the daughter of the old hag. If that was true, she would probably communicate with her mother in some way. If he was shrewd, he would be able to detect the woman's hiding-place in time.

Rodney Wayne called at Dan's office, but the detective was not there. Then the young man sent for him to put in his bill and be paid in full, but Dan paid no heed to it. His blood was up, and he was going to solve the mystery, whether Rodney retained him on the case or not.

Having decided to discharge Dan, the young man placed the matter fully in the hands of the regulars, much to their satisfaction, for Dan had triumphed over them so many times they were delighted with an opportunity to get the best of him.

The Always-on-Deck Detective was still on deck, however, and he took good care to keep Jack Backstay in the background, knowing the sailor could tell the regulars much that would interest them. In time, Roving Jack might be of great importance on the case.

Dan still had the knife with which the murder was committed, and he wished to retain it. That was one reason why he took so much care not to encounter Rodney. He soon found he was obliged to avoid the regulars as well. This he was able to do so long as he stuck to a disguise and remained away from his office.

As for Scrimpy, Dan had the gamin look sharply after Roving Jack. He did not wish the old tar to indulge too freely in stimulants, for Jack's tongue became unloosened when he was in an intoxicated condition. It was necessary for him to have a liberal amount of "grog," but it was Scrimpy's duty to see that the amount did not become too "liberal." This the gamin attended to faithfully, although he complained that it was not very exciting, and there was not much chance for him to get his name up as a great detective.

Three days passed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

DURING those three days some things took place that require recording.

Of course, Rodney Wayne lost no time in calling on Luona for an explanation of her strange conduct after the theater.

She looked perfectly radiant when she met him and drew him into her little parlor, and for a time he forgot all about the matter that had given him so much thought and trouble. He was with her, and she seemed once more her beautiful self. A kind of wild ecstasy took possession of him, and his soul seemed lifted up, with a great joy.

"How beautiful—how beautiful!" he murmured, as he devoured her with his eyes.

The flush in her cheeks grew deeper. She really and truly loved this young man, and his words, his ardor thrilled her with delight.

She did not call him a flatterer, for she had called him that before, and she had the rare faculty of seldom repeating herself in those little sayings.

For a long time they talked as lovers will, and both had apparently forgotten everything but what concerned the present moment.

At length Rodney started, remembering why he had come. She had not expressed surprise on seeing him at such an hour; instead, she had apparently been waiting for him. He wondered at that, but it was some time before he could bring himself to speak of the unpleasant subject.

Finally, he said:

"Why did you leave me so abruptly last evening?"

She started away, and he saw a bit of color leave her cheek. The jeweled fan in her hand fluttered a little and her eyes drooped.

"You do not answer," he said, after a time.

"I was thinking how I could answer," she replied.

"Does it require so much time?"

"Yes; it is not an easy thing."

"Your action was most astonishing. The more I have thought about it, the greater has been my bewilderment. You fled from me as if you feared me."

"Perhaps I did."

"No, no! you cannot mean that! Why, my darling, you know I would not harm you for a million worlds! What could cause you to fear me? You know I would not disregard your slightest wish! Oh, fear can never serve as an explanation! It was something besides that. Tell me what!"

She turned her head away and was silent again. He could see her bosom heaving and he knew she was shaken by emotion. At length, she turned to him.

"Rodney, you must trust me!" she cried.

"I do! I do!"

"But it is so hard for me to explain! I feel that I cannot explain—now."

This was disappointing to him, but he repressed his feelings to a great extent.

"Not now?"

"No—not now."

"Then you will—some time?"

"Yes, yes—some time!"

"I suppose I shall have to be content with that," he muttered. "Though I have fancied you could take away every shadow with a single word."

She took both his hands and held her face close to his.

"Perhaps I might, but—I won't now. As long as you have perfect confidence in me, it is all right. You need never doubt my love for you, for I swear you are all the man in the wide, wide world I care the weight of a feather for!"

He put his arms about her and kissed her again and again. He was not troubled by a doubt at that moment. How subtle was her art!

After a little, Rodney spoke of the future; but almost immediately, she endeavored to hush him.

"Don't don't!" she entreated, with a wildness that amazed him. "Don't speak of the future, Rodney!"

"But why not?" he asked. "It should be pleasant to you."

"It is not!—it is horrible!"

"Horrible!"

"Yes."

"I do not understand how that can be."

"Oh, there is much about me you do not understand! I knew it would be so."

"But our future is to be so happy!"

"I am not so sure of that!"

"Not sure?"

"No."

He was amazed. Here was an enigma that became more perplexing with all his attempts to find a solution.

"But we are to be together always—till death parts us."

He saw a look of horror fill her great dark eyes.

"Death!" she whispered. "Oh, death is so near—so near!"

"Why, how foolish you are!" he cried, trying to reassure her. "You are very young, and death is still a long distance away."

"You do not know—you do not know!"

He did not understand her.

"Nobody knows," he said. "But when men and women are young they naturally look ahead to a long life. They think of the future—they plan for the future. Our future is to be together, so why should we not talk about it and lay our plans?"

"Because I do not wish to do so, Rodney. Surely that is sufficient reason?"

"It must be, strange though it may seem. Last night you refused to speak of our marriage, and now you refuse to discuss the future at all. Luona, you are one little bundle of sweet mystery!"

Her eyes told him she heard his every word, although her lips did not confess as much.

"I dreamed of you last night," said Rodney.

She laughed.

"You did? Oh, Rodney! that was strange! No, no, no! It was not strange! I did not mean that. I dream of *you* every night! But what was your dream?"

He told her, and she listened to it all.

"I thought you were being carried away by a terrible monster—carried away to some dark cave or dungeon. The creature who had you in his power was most horrible to look upon. He was a perfect giant. You turned your glorious face toward me, and I saw it was convulsed with fear. You were as pale as the dead. You held out your hands—these hands—to me and cried for help. My God! How that cry struck to my heart! I tried to pursue the fiend, but, at first, I could not stir. However, after a time, I did pursue and overtook him. Then we fought."

"How glorious!" she cried, her eyes flashing.

"And you were the victor—you killed the monster? I *know* you did! Then I rewarded you with a kiss."

He sadly shook his head, forcing a smile to his lips.

"I did destroy the monster—I strangled him. You saw me do it, but you did not reward me with a kiss."

"If it had actually happened, I would!" she declared. "Dreams are never right!"

"This was wrong—very wrong! When I had strangled the monster, I looked at you, but before my eyes you changed. I saw it all, and I was filled with a horror that I shall never forget. Your beautiful face slowly assumed another shape, and at the same time your body became bent and like that of an aged person. But your face—that fascinated me! It was horrible—it was like that of a fiend! It was old and wrinkled and your teeth were yellow and broken. Your flesh was wrinkled and your cheeks sunken. Down over your face hung a tangled mass of white hair, through which gleamed a pair of fiery eyes. You—"

But she heard no more. With a cry that rung through the rooms, she sprung to her feet and staggered from him, her hands pressed to her head. In the center of the floor she paused and swayed to and fro as if about to fall.

He leaped up and reached her, catching her in his arms and wildly calling her name.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "What have I done? Fool that I am! I have frightened you nearly out of your senses! I should have known better!"

She struggled to escape from his arms, but he held her fast and would not let her go.

"Be quiet, Luona!" he entreated. "It was only a dream—nothing more."

He tried to look into her eyes, but she covered them with her hands and seemed to fear his glance. He felt her trembling violently.

He had little thought the telling of his dream would bring about such a display, and it only added to the air of mystery which seemed to surround the beautiful girl who fascinated him. And that very air of mystery made her fascination stronger.

He carried her back to the couch and held her in his arms. She had covered her face with her handkerchief, and she would occasionally catch her breath in a sobbing manner.

It was some time before she was fully pacified.

Then came a knock upon the door.

Making sure her appearance was all right, Luona answered it. The moment the door was opened, some one uttered a cry of triumph and a hand caught her by the wrist.

Then Lawyer Joseph Falkner forced his way into the room.

"Ha! ha!" he cried. "I have found you, my pretty bird! You thought to give me the slip, but I traced you here! You are not to escape me so easily! Our relations are not to end so suddenly. You have managed to get about three thousand dollars out of me, and I mean to have a full return!"

"Release me, you wretch!" cried the girl.

The man laughed evilly.

"That is stagey!" he asserted. "I will release you when I get good and ready."

"You will release her *now*!"

Then Rodney Wayne caught him by the neck and wrenched him backward.

"You infernal scoundrel!" grated the young man. "I have a mind to kill you!"

The lawyer saw by the speaker's face that he spoke the truth. Rodney's features were convulsed with fury. He hurled the lawyer to the floor, while Luona fell back, crying out in terror.

Falkner knew his life was in danger, and he hastily sprung up.

"So you are the defender of such a creature as that!" he sneered.

"Do you dare breathe a word against her? Then I will kill you!"

In another moment they clinched. It was a struggle for life or death.

Shrieking, Luona fled to the adjoining room.

Like fiends the men fought. They made no outcry, and the sound of the battle did not reach the hall, the door having been swung to after

Falkner. Around the room they careened, swaying, panting, now and then striking sodden blows. At length both fell, the lawyer being undermost. His head struck heavily and he lay still, his eyes closed. At first, Rodney grasped his throat, but the failure of the man to resist caused him to draw back. Then he arose, staring in a horrified manner at the silent, prostrate form.

"Great God! I have really killed him!"

Something like a horrible, rattling laugh caused him to wheel toward the door of the next room.

And there—there in the doorway that led to the sleeping chamber of the beautiful Luona he saw the creature of his dream! The face, form, eyes and hair were the same.

And the clothes were the very garments Luona had worn a few minutes before!

The horrible creature lifted her claw-like hands and screamed:

"Kill him! kill him! kill him!"

Of a sudden the room seemed tottering on all sides of the young man. The floor reeled beneath his feet and the ceiling came down upon his head!

Was it an earthquake?

With that thought came oblivion.

CHAPTER XL.

WHAT SCRIMPY SAW.

How long he remained unconscious Rodney never knew. At length he stirred and finally he sat up, looking around him. He was alone in the room where the struggle had taken place. There had been no earthquake; that was all a phantasma of his swooning moments.

But the horrible old hag? Had he also imagined he saw her? Surely that must be the explanation.

Where was Falkner?

In vain he looked for the dead body of the lawyer; and then it dawned upon him, that he had not killed the man after all.

Falkner had been stunned by the shock of his fall, and while Rodney lay in an unconscious condition, the lawyer had escaped from the room. The door was still standing open.

But what had become of Luona?

He arose to his feet, calling her name. There was no reply. At first he could scarcely stand, and he was obliged to cling to the nearest piece of furniture for support; but, after a time, his weakness passed.

Then he started to search for the beautiful girl. But, as he was about to peer into her chamber, he drew back shuddering at the thought of the hag-like creature he had seen in the doorway.

Had he really imagined he saw her there? He almost fancied he could still hear her cry of "Kill him, kill him!" ringing in his ears.

If it had been entirely a case of imagination, it had seemed most horribly real.

Bracing up resolutely, he entered the room.

Luona was not there.

She was not anywhere in the apartments.

He was alone!

Then came a horrible thought.

Falkner had carried her away!

Like a mad creature he rushed out into the street and hailed a cabman. Directly he was being whirled toward the lawyer's office.

He found Falkner there, nursing a sore throat.

The lawyer actually grinned as he saw his late antagonist, but he cautioned Rodney to keep at a proper distance.

"You devil!" grated the furious young man.

"What have you done with her?"

And then it came out that Falkner had hastened from the rooms the moment he recovered, not pausing to look for Luona, being only too glad to escape with his life.

"Look here, young man," he said, soberly, "we had both better drop that creature. She has made a perfect fool of me, and she is doing the same thing with you. Get shut of her as soon as possible, is my advice."

But Rodney Wayne was in no condition to listen to such advice.

"If I find you have lied to me about taking her away, I will kill you!" he raved, and then he dashed from the office.

Falkner shook his head, soberly.

"That beautiful little devil has fascinated him and turned his head," he muttered. "Too bad! too bad!"

Like one distracted, Rodney sought for Luona, but he found her not.

"Tell yer w'at's der matter, boss!" cried Scrumpy, breathlessly depositing himself in a chair. "Dat old gal's der deuce!"

"What ails you now?" asked Double-voice Dan, curiously, turning to his youthful assistant.

"Well, I's seen somepn' w'at I don't git over fer a mont' of Sundays!"

"Spit it out, Scrumps—give us the particulars."

"I don't durst."

"Do not dare? Why not?"

"You'll call me der blamedest liar in New York."

"Oh, I guess not! Go ahead with the yarn."

I have never known you to lie to me with malice aforethought."

"Well, I dunno w'at dat means; but dis w'at I's goin' ter tell yer is der dead straight t'ing. If I lie, I hope I'll never be able ter utter another yip long as I live!"

"Go ahead."

"Well, I spotted Old Sal."

"By George! that's interesting! I hope you have her holed!"

"Well, I's got somepn' more interestin' dan dat ter tell. I follered her."

"That was right."

"I follered clean inter a ranch down on Maiden Lane."

"Ah!"

"I was boun' not ter let her give me der slide, so I crep' down some stairs inter an old cellar where she went."

"Well?"

"Well, der cellar was partitioned off inter rooms. Old Sal went inter one of dem. She was togged queer fer her. Wore a shawl dat covered her 'most all over. I peeked t'rough a crack an' saw her in der room where she went."

"Go on!" cried Dan, with increasing interest.

"She t'rowed off dat shawl, an' under it she was all rigged like a gal."

"Like a girl?"

"Yep; had on a nice, stylish dress. Dere was a veil over her face all der time, but I knowed her jest der same. Beazley Nuggins was in dat room."

"Yes?"

"Sure. He growled somepn' ter her, but she never paid no 'tention. She took somepn' out of a pocket. It was all done in a paper. I heerd her say dere was jest enough fer two more doses, and den she divided it. I tried ter git a look at der stuff, but der crack wasn't big enuff. After she divvied it, she took out w'at looked 'bout as big as a wine-glass, but it was iron."

"Iron?"

"Yep."

"Go on."

"She put der stuff in dat, an' den she snarled out dat she wanted some water. Nuggins fetched her some in a dish. Now comes der part you won't b'lieve. Never'd b'lieved it meself if I hadn't see'd it wid me own peepers."

"She jest held dat iron business w'at contained der stuff she'd divvied—she held it in one hand, so," and Scrumpy illustrated. "Den she took der dipper of water in der odder han', so. Den she turned some of der water in der iron glass."

"Well?"

"Hully gee! You'd orter seen it, boss! I near had a fit!"

"Why, dat water set der stuff on fire!"

"The stuff in the iron dish?"

"Yep."

"It was some kind of a trick with chemicals," declared Dan.

"Well, I dunno w'at it was, but der fire leaped right up out of dat iron glass, an' it burned pink an' blue an' yaller an' all kinds of colors! Der old gal held it in her han' an' luffed! Den, all ter oncet, quick as scat, out went der fire!"

"What then?"

"Der woman lifted dat veil and swallowed all der stuff dere was left in der iron glass!"

"Swallowed it?"

"Drinked it, boss!"

"That was strange!"

"But der next t'ing knocked me silly. She jest give a great cry an' staggered like she was hit; an' den she straightened up, groanin' awful. It made me shiver. But w'en she had straightened all up, she jest ripped dat veil from her face an' turned so I could see her. Hully gee! Jimminy rickets! Holy smokeses an' all der odder t'ings! W'at yer s'pose I saw?"

"Give it up."

"She wasn't Old Sal no more!"

"No?"

"She was der handsome black-eyed gal w'ot Rod Wayne is dead stuck on!"

Dan sprung to his feet.

"Then you were deceived in thinking she was Old Sal?"

"Nary bit, boss! I follered Old Sal inter dat cellar an' I seen her drink dat stuff. But w'en she had dranked it, she turned ter der gal!"

"Nonsense! Such a thing is impossible! Scrumps, you have been dreaming!"

"Nary dream, boss. I knowed you wouldn't b'lieve der yarn, but it's on der dead level. I'll swear ter it. It jest clean knocked me out, an' Beazley Nuggins sot like stone in der chair. Der gal didn't wait, but she jest hurried out of dere. I was so dumfustigated dat I didn't foller her till it was too late. She left der door open, an' I went in. Nuggins was right in dat chair, an' he never stirred. I went up ter him, an' he was dead as last year's hay!"

"Dead?"

"Sure."

"Why, what killed him?"

"I reckon it was w'at he saw, boss. He was plumb skeered ter death."

Dan looked the gamin all over.

"Scrumps, it must be you have been taking too much beer! I am sorry! I'll have to look after you better. Too bad!"

But the boy insisted he had told nothing but the truth, and he finally induced Dan to accompany him to the cellar on Maiden Lane.

There they found The Slasher dead in a chair, exactly as the boy had declared he died.

Dan knocked on the door of Luona's room.

In a few moments the door was opened by the beautiful girl herself.

Dan promptly stepped in.

"Inez Cordova, I arrest you for the murder of Colonel Wayne!" he cried, placing a hand on her shoulder.

A shriek burst from her lips.

"Rodney!" she screamed—"Rodney, save me!—protect me!"

The call was answered by Rodney Wayne himself, who had found her there in those rooms that very night. He leaped forward and clutched the detective.

"Release her!" he shouted.

Then the two men grappled in desperate contest.

For a moment Luona stood with clasped hands, watching the battle, and then she fled from the room.

"You fool!" grated the detective. "I have no warrant to arrest that woman. It was simply an experiment to see if she would betray herself. She did! Rodney Wayne, she is the one who killed your father!"

There was something so impressive about the detective's words and manner that the young man was robbed of his strength, and he gave over the struggle.

But it was too late for Dan to intercept Luona. She had escaped from the building and disappeared.

CHAPTER XLI.

BEYOND BELIEF.

THE following day a beautiful girl was found dead in an apartment of a second-rate hotel.

It was Luona!

An empty vial labeled "Poison" explained how her death came about.

She had suicided!

But she had left a written confession, which is here given in full:

"TO RODNEY WAYNE:—

"The terrible hour has come! I am standing on the threshold of death, and there must be no faltering or turning back. There is but one course left open to me, and that is to take my own life! I am filled with horror when I think of death, but my horror is greater when I think of living! In death I may still appear young and beautiful, but in life I must be old and haggard—a wretched thing, scorned and despised!

"I know you will come and see me, Rodney, and before you read any more of this, I wish you would kiss me. It will be for the last time, for you will soon turn from me with loathing and abhorrence. I truly loved you, Rodney! To me you were a king! Perhaps I ought not to write this confession, for then you might forever think kindly of me; but a power other than my own controls me. I must let you know the truth—the whole black truth!

"How sweet it would have been to live with you—as your wife! But that was not to be. You would have made me your wife, but I should have been unable to keep my secret from you after that. Some time the change would have occurred before your eyes, and it would have driven you mad. That was why I refused to marry you.

"You wished to talk of the future, but I feared to look into the future, for there I saw this day, lurking like an assassin, lying in wait for me. I was happy then, but I knew the future held misery and disaster for me.

"You will not understand this, and I doubt that you will believe the revelation I am about to place in writing. Whether you believe it or not, it is true. Looking death in the face, as I am, I repeat, it is true.

"I look in the mirror at my side, and there is the reflection of a young girl of twenty—a girl in the full bloom of perfect youth.

"That reflection is made by a woman who is past sixty years of age!

"Now you may say I am deranged, but it is not so. I have told a simple truth. I am an old woman, not a young girl. I am Spanish, and my true name is Inez Cordova. I came to this country many years ago, assisted in doing so by a foolish young sailor who was enamored with me.

"Oh, if you had only been living then, Rodney! If I had met you and known you as you are now! All my life would have been changed! I would not now be the wicked, sin-stained creature I am! I would not take poison to escape the hand of justice.

"I think I was always wicked to a certain extent. It was born in me, but I might have controlled it had I been brought up aright. But my mother was not a good woman. In some way she had discovered the secret of youth, and she always appeared in public looking scarcely a year older than I. In our home I knew her as an old woman with a wrinkled face and white hair. I wondered how she produced the change, and I was in great fear of her. She made me swear never to reveal any of her secrets, and she declared she would kill me if I did.

"One day I saw her drink from an iron cup. What she swallowed had been blazing a moment before. When she had swallowed it, she cried and groaned, as if in the most horrible pain, and then a wonderful change took place.

"She became young and beautiful before my eyes!

"She did not know I had been watching her, but I betrayed myself by shrieking and fainting. When I became conscious, she was crouching over me, with the serpent dagger of our family in her hand. She was furious and seemed about to take my life. I

begged and entreated, but for some time my life hung by a thread. At length, she consented to spare me, but again swore me to secrecy.

From that moment my life was a burden while I lived with her. I was in constant fear lest she kill me in order to preserve her secret. She watched me always as closely as she could, and I determined to escape from her in some manner. This I did with the assistance of the young sailor.

"When I left my home, I took two things with me. One was the serpent dagger of the family; the other was a small amount of bluish powder, which was like that I had seen my mother place in the iron cup and mix with something that caused it to burst into flame. What that powder was I never knew. I kept it through all the changes of my life.

"I will not make this confession too long, but I must explain that I never really loved the young sailor who aided me to escape from Cuba, but I felt grateful to him at first and made him think I loved him. After he tried to kill me, I had the deepest hatred for him. He had struck me before that, but he left me to die in the fire. I was saved, and I swore I would have his life some day. I have not kept that oath.

"Then came another—a rich young blond. Rodney, he was your father! I thought I loved him, and I fancied he loved me. He did promise to marry me, but when he had robbed me of all a woman holds dear, he declined to keep his promise. I will not horrify you with the full story of my life after that, but I went down—down—down! Oh, Rodney! your father was much to blame for it! I was hungry—starving—when I first fell into his power; but he did promise to marry me.

"Well, I always cherished a terrible hatred for Andrew Wayne. As I grew older and sunk lower, the desire grew upon me to murder him. But for years he was beyond my reach. He was in the army, where he became an officer. When the war was over, he came back to New York and married at once. You were born a year after the marriage.

"I always kept watch of Andrew Wayne, although he knew it not. He thought me dead, an impression I purposely gave out. It was better had I died! I grew old, and the fiend in me obtained full possession.

"I had not forgotten the blue powders, but in all my experiments I had been unable to make them burn. I swallowed some, but they were simply tasteless and did not affect me in the least. Still, I felt sure the secret of youth lay in them, if I only knew how to use them.

"One day I discovered the secret. I had placed some of the powders in an iron dish and, quite by accident, I spilled a little water on it. In an instant the powder burst into flame! I was startled, but I knew I had hit upon the secret. When the fire died out, I did not hesitate about swallowing the thick mass that was left behind.

"I cannot tell the agony I endured. It was horrible, but I became young and beautiful, in the perfect flush of youth! Heavens! what joy I felt! Life was worth living once more!

"But it did not last. For hours I was young, but the time came when I changed back to an old woman again. Then I felt more fiend-like than ever, and I resolved to kill Andrew Wayne. I did so! The window of his house was open, and I had been watching outside for hours. I saw him enter and light the gas. Then I sprang in upon him. I struck him to the heart with the serpent knife. I saw him fall and I fled, only turning back to make sure he was really dead. It was then, Rodney, you saw me at the window. In the excitement of the deed, I dropped the dagger with which it was committed.

"Why tell everything that followed? Much is known to you, imagination can supply the rest. As Luona I was able to obtain money. Rich men will pay for beauty. Lawyer Falkner was one who paid dearly, and then, in a fit of rage, he tried to murder me. My youth gave me a sort of power that I used to my advantage. Just what it was I cannot tell, but I was able to control any man I tried my art upon. But you, Rodney—you are the only one I ever loved! When you have read thus far, you will have grown to hate and abhor me! The thought is horrible!

"The spells during which the power made me young grew shorter and shorter. And, with unutterable horror, I saw the powder grow less and less. I knew the time would come when there would be no more, and then I would be Old Sal and never Luona again!

"And Dan Downing, the detective, was looking for Old Sal, believing she murdered Andrew Wayne! You can see to what a strait I was driven. There is nothing but death—no other way is open to me!

"But I do not wish to die as Old Sal. I desire to die as a young and beautiful girl—as Luona! I have secured a deadly and almost instantaneous poison. I have also swallowed the last of the powder. The poison shall follow it, and I pray that in death I shall not change to a creature that is old, haggard and repulsive!

"Good-by, Rodney, good-by! I have the poison in my hand—I lift it to my lips! *Adios!* Farewell forever!

LUONA."

It is not possible to describe the sensation the confession produced. The papers were full of it, but it was generally ridiculed. Perhaps the only persons who had the utmost confidence in it were Rodney Wayne and Scrimpy Stubbs. Even Double-voice Dan was full of doubts.

But something seemed to tell Rodney the confession was true, and a great revulsion came over him. He did abhor the dead woman, and he felt as if he had escaped from the power of a strange spell. He understood that his feeling for her had not been true love, but passion of a different nature. She had controlled him by that power of which she spoke, and, but for her death, would have wrecked his life.

Once released from the spell, he realized he still loved Iva Delmar. But he was in despair, for all seemed over between them. He had broken with her, and she could only regard him with feelings of scorn and contempt.

In vain Double-voice Dan looked for Old Sal, being inclined to believe his first theory that Luona was the daughter of the old hag. Not even the confession of the siren convinced him. It was beyond belief, and his sober judgment revolted against accepting it, even though it had been reasoned out at the time when he found Rodney and Luona together for the last time.

To add to Dan's doubts, expert physicians made an examination of the suicide's brain and pronounced it that of a person mentally unbalanced. Then it seemed that her confession must have, in a measure, come from the imaginings of a madwoman.

Still Old Sal had disappeared and was never again seen to skulk along the alley-ways of New York.

How much of the confession was true and how much was false is probably something that will never be explained.

Bark Murphy and Hack Gibson escaped punishment for their sandbagging affair, but were afterward arrested and tried for "crib-cracking." They were convicted and sentenced.

Roving Jack Backstay roves no more. He received an injury that fully incapacitated him for the sea, but he unexpectedly fell heir to a comrade's belongings, and there was enough to provide for him during the rest of his life.

Scrimpy is still Dan Downing's pupil, and an apt scholar he is proving. Dan is proud of him.

In time the breach between Rodney and Iva was healed, Rupert having intercepted Rodney's letter and withheld it from his sister, for some reason. Iva never knew the true history of the affair, for when Rupert and Rodney became friends again, her brother told the lover he thought it best never to let her know.

So she became Rodney's wife, and he made her a true and faithful husband. There is one black period in his life of which he never thinks without a thrill of pain and remorse.

Dan Downing is still "on deck," and he has no more faithful friend in all the world than Rodney Wayne.

THE END.

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